Feminist collaboration: relationships between women across political, business and intersubjective worlds

Page, Margaret L.

Award date:
2001

Awarding institution:
University of Bath

Feminist Collaboration

Relationships between Women

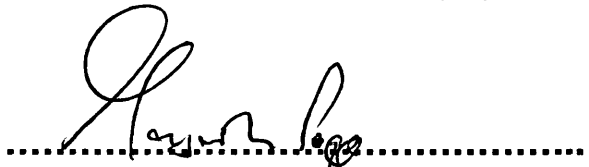
across

Political, Business and Intersubjective Worlds

submitted by

Margaret L. Page

For the degree of PhD
University of Bath
2001



Margaret L. Page

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Feminist Collaboration

Relationships between Women

across

Political, Business and Intersubjective Worlds

Contents

Acknowledgements

This work is dedicated to my mother, whose pride in my achievement means so much to me, and whose life was and is so different to mine.

I wish to acknowledge the supportive challenge of my supervisor Judi Marshall, who encouraged me to bring myself more fully into my inquiry. I thank her and members of my CARPP inquiry group, the wider CARPP community and Peter Reason for helping to co-create and resource an environment within which to develop.

Throughout my inquiry I was sustained and encouraged by my friends, family and colleagues. I wish to acknowledge the many conversations from which I drew inspiration and material and to thank them for their interest, support and encouragement throughout my inquiry. In particular I thank Anne Scott, Elizabeth Sclater and John Southgate for conceptual exchange and feedback on draft material; Jane Grant and Siobhan Rearden for research support; Gina Barker, Helen Brown, Wendy Clark, Carole FurnivalL Michelle Guimarin, Lynne Harne, Frances Heywood, Ruth Hayden, Steve Mendel, Marion Scott, Josephine Zara and Darja Zavirsek for their sustaining friendship throughout.

Finally I acknowledge the political commitment and scholarship of feminist activists and researchers. This inquiry is intended as a contribution to this body of research and practice in order to support women's struggle for social justice and equality.

Summary

This thesis describes the development and findings of my inquiry, and its impact within my life process. It traces parallels between challenges that emerged in my inquiry in building and sustaining collaborative relationships between women who were working towards gender equality in organisations, and challenges that emerged in my life process and professional practice.

The first section situates my inquiry in political and personal life context. 'Feminist action inquiry' methodology is introduced with its key epistemological concepts and practices and criteria for quality (chapter 2). Subsequent chapters describe inquiry practices and findings within pathways that overlap and are grounded in personal and professional spheres Patterns in relationship identified in discussion and in professional collaborations with women within the inquiry (chapters 3 – 4). Shifts in relationship patterns are achieved through reflective and dialogic practices, through which subject to subject interaction is sustained and subject to object interaction repaired.

In the second section generative and degenerative patterns of interaction are traced between women working towards equality in organisations (chapter 6). Research on women in organisations is reviewed; the concepts of 'enacting gender' and of 'subject to subject' dialogue are adapted to consider how gender power is enacted or reproduced in interactions between women (chapters 7 and 8). A conceptual framework is developed that draws together key concepts from relational psychoanalysis, and feminist post colonial and organisational research sources.

Three case studies describe use of inquiry practices within consultancy projects to sustain challenge to women's inequality and enable analysis of gender power dynamics (chapters 9 – 11). Key methodological challenges for feminist consultancy are then conceptualised for working within and across multiple frames in political and business environments (chapter 12).

Four 'Red Threads' intersperse key chapters to develop a political meta-commentary and draw out political and ethical dilemmas. Final reflections draw together cross cutting themes within life process and consultancy practice inquiry pathways.

Chapter 1

Introduction

What Brought Me to This Inquiry?

My inquiry

There is increasing anecdotal evidence of difficult relationships between women in positions of power and those who are not, in both mixed and women only settings. In the women's voluntary sector inability to negotiate these issues poses serious difficulties (Grant 1999). Yet organisational research rarely addresses power issues *between* women in either gender mixed or women's organisations.

In my action inquiry I set out to explore how these difficulties were experienced, conceptualised and negotiated by women in a range of organisational settings and roles. I wanted to contribute new ways of understanding these dynamics, in order to generate and to document interventions to sustain women in positive negotiation of power difference in their organisational roles. I also wanted to come to understand my own experience of these dynamics, and drawing from this experience to write more effectively about my feminist consultancy practice.

During my inquiry I developed a methodology which grounded my approach to my inquiry subject in my consultancy practice and life experience. In this introductory chapter I describe how my inquiry developed from my feminist politics.

Political grounding

My feminist activism began when I took part in socialist feminist campaigning and study groups in the 1970s and early 1980s. I chose employment positions in local authorities that allowed me to pursue my politics. With other feminists who were part of the women's movement I sought ways of introducing feminist political analysis into my professional practice as a local authority social worker, community worker and as a women's equality advisor. Finally after a brief period as manager of a community development initiative, my post was deleted. In 1990 I took voluntary redundancy and began my freelance consultancy career.

Throughout this time I was concerned with 'insider / outsider' alliances between women who were identified with feminist politics, and who were pursuing initiatives in or around local government. We developed practices and policies to address inequalities arising from differences such as race, class, disability, and sexuality and discussed how these influenced access to political and organisational power. As a freelance consultant this vision of alliances between women working towards equality from different social and organisational locations continues to inspire my work

In my autobiographical writing I explored the challenges of working towards this vision and how my understanding of the limitations and scope of my work developed in these three key positions of employment. I asked:

> *Why is it that I continue to be inspired and to draw meaning from a vision that has been - and continues to be - a source of frustration and disappointment as well as a source of direction and purpose?*
> Page (1999b)

I found part of my answer in writing about the feminist international consultancy practice that I developed in the 1990s. During this period I worked with newly emerging feminist organisations in Slovenia and Bulgaria, facilitating exchange and partnerships with women' voluntary organisations in England. As an independent researcher I took part in the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, and the parallel Forum for Non

Governmental Organisations. In the following I describe this consultancy and how it provided me with a sense of purpose:

> *International networking with women becomes a central focus in the next years of my consultancy. During the period 1992 to the present international partnerships with women were at the centre of my consultancy and high points in terms of my energy and creativity. I expressed this sense of excitement in my autobiographical writing in early stages of my inquiry:*
>
> *There is something about going to the airport, knowing I am contributing to a project which is highly valued, in a context of working relationships in which there is a high degree of learning through exchange, which nourishes my sense of purpose and belonging.*
>
> Page (1999b)

Between 1991 and 1995 I became increasingly determined to find ways of developing research which would document and strengthen feminist co-operation across organisational boundaries. Equal opportunities policies had increasingly been introduced in local government. In common with many others I felt strongly that co-operation between feminists inside and outside local and national government was needed to achieve implementation.

I raised funds for two research projects both of which concerned 'insider / outsider' collaboration between feminists, in areas of practice with which I had been deeply engaged. The first with Italian co-researchers explored how women politicians, employees and independents worked through political structures to achieve change in policy and practice (Page and Lorandi 1992). In the second my focus was on collaboration and negotiation between women in government and in non-governmental organisations at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women (Page 1996). My findings showed how women negotiated competing structures for accountability, and identified the ingredients of success for and barriers to coalition and alliance building.

How my inquiry began

At the end of this research I was left with questions about my experience of women's working together which I felt I had still not articulated. I wanted to research the intersubjective dynamics between women in more depth. My interest was fuelled by the quality of discussion about this subject, in one to one conversations and workshops where I presented the findings of my previous research. These discussions had urgency and a flow in which I felt an accomplice, as if part of a tradition of women's complaint about an aspect of our experience that was lamentable, but could not be changed. There was a fascination about the idea of writing about these issues, from a feminist perspective, that implied I might be breaking a taboo. There was political risk involved, that in naming these difficulties I might expose feminist endeavour in a political environment in which equal opportunities initiatives for women were already under attack. However I had abundant anecdotal evidence about women's difficulties in working together in organisational contexts and of how these were undermining individual women, and the feminist collaboration which was needed in order to implement equalities initiatives.

I determined to address the lack of research focussing on women to women dynamics in organisational contexts, and to find ways of finding funding to do. I drew up proposals for funded action research and over a two year period initiated exploratory discussions with potential clients and consultancy partners. These led to a successful bid for the transnational partnership project described in my third case study (chapter 11). It also led to two further consultancy projects concerned with women's equality, in which I was able to introduce inquiry into relationships between women in organisational contexts; I describe these in case studies 1 and 2 (chapters 9 and 10).

At the same time I drew up a research proposal focusing on women's subjective experience of their inter-relationships across differences of power, and decided to pursue it as a PhD. I wanted my research to be action orientated and to draw from my consultancy projects. I also wanted to explore further the personal meaning I had invested in the research subject.

The PhD programme at the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP) offered a taught programme and research community designed to support mature students who wished to link their research to their professional practice. This approach met my need to be sustained in balancing my research with the professional demands of freelance consultancy, and the financial challenges of being a self-financing student. At the same time its location in the School of Management seemed to offer 'mainstream' credibility that I was seeking in my consultancy practice.

The CARPP approach to 'research as life process' seemed compatible with my conviction that to move my inquiry forward I needed to conceptualise woman to women dynamics in terms of inner world dynamics as well as organisational and social position and identity. I sought ways of conceptualising the interface between inner and outer worlds that did not simply reproduce the psychodynamic conceptual frames with which I was familiar. I also hoped to find a more lively way to write about my consultancy practice, and to find a way of presenting this to colleagues and potential clients.

I named the proposal I brought to CARPP '*Women Taking Authority within the Public Sphere: at the interface between our internal and external worlds*'. On transfer to PhD, to reflect my stronger focus on relationships between women I changed it to '*What Happens Between Women in Organisations*'.

In the course of my inquiry I lived through major life changes in professional as well as personal spheres. These changes interrupted the inquiry I had planned; my engagement with them within my inquiry deepened my approach to my inquiry subject, and informed the development of my methodology. Through my inquiry practices I developed strategies for sustaining myself through these life changes, and developed a methodological framework that acknowledges and works with the permeable boundaries between professional practice and other life experience.

Note

Inquiry as life process: *a note to my readers*

In the following chapter I present my methodology.

In this note I invite you to share an editorial dilemma. Should I continue with my narrative, and risk criticism for insufficient evidence of rigour in my methods? Or should I interrupt the narrative flow with a conceptual chapter, and risk losing the narrative under the weight of a too early theorisation of insufficiently introduced subject matter?

To resolve this dilemma I offer you, my readers, an alternative. If you prefer to continue with the narrative, skip forward to the introduction to Section 1, and chapters 3, 4 and 5. These chapters describe how my inquiry developed, within my professional practice and life process. The section ends with an overview of my inquiry tracks, showing my inquiry into life process cross fertilised and interlinked with the consultancy based inquiry described in my case studies. At this point you might return to my methodology in the following chapter.

If on the other hand you feel ready to be introduced to my methodological framework, read on.

Chapter 2

Feminist Action Inquiry

My Methodological Framework

Feminism is not just a perspective (way of seeing) or an epistemology (way of knowing), it is also ontology, or a way of being in the world
(Stanley 1990: 14 quoted in Maguire 2000: 60)

Overview

This chapter is in four sections. In 'Key Principles' I introduce my approach to inquiry and the key concepts that underpin my methodological framework. In three subsequent sections I introduce the concepts that informed how I enacted feminist inquiry and describe challenges; introduce my inquiry practices; and elaborate my criteria for research quality.

In chapter 5 I will show how development and conceptualisation of my inquiry methodology was intertwined with development of my inquiry. I refer to this process as an inquiry track in its own right, in which I articulated the epistemological and methodological principles that informed my inquiry practices. In writing this chapter on methodology I completed the final cycle of this inquiry track. In writing it I built on earlier papers written and discussed on the CARPP programme. I drew from feminist and action research literature to articulate more clearly the practices I had developed within each inquiry track, and drew them together within a methodological framework. I discussed drafts with my supervisor, and worked with her critical feedback.

Key Principles

'Feminist action inquiry' brings together key strands of my purpose and approach to doing this research. These were to enact and support feminist individual and collective action for equality and for social justice; and to engage in a form of action research in which transformation of external and internal worlds are articulated and intertwined. Thus my research sets out to sustain relationships between people who set out to transform the world, and, in doing so, to transform the self.

In this section I locate my approach in relation to the key principles of feminist and action research and action inquiry. In further sections I explore challenges to enacting these principles, and the practice of doing feminist inquiry.

Feminist Standpoint

My feminism provides the political grounding of my action inquiry. It consists of a commitment to developing the tools for understanding the mechanisms of women's oppression, in order to change it through collective organisation and individual struggle. As Stanley said of feminist inquiry, the point is to change the world, not only to study it (Stanley 1990: 15).

In my inquiry I set out to understand 'what happens between women in organisations', in order to strengthen feminist action and collaboration. My purpose was to develop a conceptual frame that would address the intersubjective dynamics that in my experience undermined effective collaboration, and provide methods and tools for sustaining it through my feminist consultancy.

In order to do so I drew from the principles of action and of feminist research methodology, and the practices and tools of action inquiry. I illustrate how I drew from these principles in the subsections below.

Action Research

Action research is made up of many strands, and diverse practices. It does not offer a ready-made methodology, but rather a set of general principles with which I am strongly identified. These are described by the editors of the recent Handbook of Action Research as seeking:

> To bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. Reason and Bradbury 2000, p. 1

These authors assert that action research is concerned with working towards practical outcomes, through being involved with people in their everyday lives; creating new forms of understanding through reflection on action; and through this process new forms of being together. Thus the process of inquiry is as important as the outcomes; research emerges over time as a developmental process, and is emancipatory, leading not just to new practical knowledge but to new abilities to create knowledge. It cannot be defined in terms of hard and fast methods, but is a 'work of art' (Lyotard 1979, quoted by Reason and Bradbury p.2).

My research approach shared these key features. It was informed as earlier chapters illustrated, by my previous political, professional and personal practice (chapters 1, 3, and 4). These in turn were grounded in specific organisational, political and historical contexts.

My inquiry methods were refined and conceptualised through a succession of inquiry cycles, within interlinked inquiry tracks (chapter 5). This process was multi-layered. Through my inquiry I developed consultancy tools which enabled women with whom I worked to create new knowledge and make change interventions (chapters 10 -11). I then further conceptualised the consultancy approach I developed (chapter 12). I also developed inquiry practices to sustain myself in action (chapters 3, 4 and 7) in relation to family and friends, and within my professional networks. In doing so I engaged with the politics of ontological, epistemological and professional issues, and tracked transformation of my sense of self in relationship to others in family and in my professional circles.

Engagement with Research Sources

Throughout my inquiry I drew from research literature relating to my inquiry subject, identified concepts that seemed to illumine my inquiry issues, and engaged with them critically from a perspective grounded in my feminist consultancy practice. My key concepts were initially drawn from psychodynamic and feminist research and practice; my sources were communities of practice, as well as texts. I identified relevant literature through conversations with friends, colleagues, researchers within the CARPP community; through participation at research conferences, professional development and networking events; as well as through journals, and searches in libraries. As my inquiry progressed, I engaged with these concepts critically, making meaning of them in the context of my own inquiry practice. This process often led to further learning, as I observed and critiqued my use of the concepts and, in stepping outside the conceptual frames from which they were drawn, took up new ontological and political positions. For example, in my inquiry into 'un/belonging', critical engagement with the concept of 'secure base' lead me to relinquish desire to 'find' belonging and to develop inquiry practices for 'making' connection (chapter 7). In my third case study I returned to my gender analysis of the concept to reinterpret the power dynamics between the project leader and myself, and reposition myself in relation to her (chapter 11).

At the beginning of my inquiry my epistemological frame was primarily psychodynamic, and grounded in group relations practice. This practice seeks to bring together an understanding of the emotional life of institutions with an understanding of how management and organisational structures help or hinder their ability to fulfil the organisations' purpose. It combines theories and insights arising from the work of Bion on groups (1961), Kleinian theory as applied to groups and institutions, open systems theory and socio-techical approaches (Obholzer and Roberts 1994, p. xvii).

Through participation in experiential group relations events, such as the Tavistock Institute's Leicester Conference[1], I used systemic and psychodynamic frames to explore leadership, power, authority, and learning in my client organisations (Hirschorn 1993; Graves Dumas 1985; Miller 1989,1993; Obholzer and Zagier Roberts 1994). I was drawn

[1] An annual group relations conference to study 'Authority, Leadership and Organisation'. This two week residential experiential event is run by the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations to study 'group, organisational and social dynamics; the exercise of authority and power; the interplay between tradition, innovation and change; and the relationship of an organisation to its social, political and economic environment'.

to this body of practice because it offered opportunities to apply my experience of many years of psychoanalysis within my consultancy practice. I drew from this literature and experience to develop a systemic analysis of gendered power relations in my inquiry within my client organisation in my third case study (chapter 11).

Much of the focus on group relations is on containing destructive dynamics in organisations. Through friendship and professional networks I was introduced to discussions about applications of attachment research in organisational settings. These discussions highlighted the potential for a different approach to leadership, based on responsibility to create environments that encouraged 'secure attachment' within human relations (Marris 1996). The concept of 'secure base' in attachment research also served as an important metaphor for me during separation and loss within my own life (Bowlby 1988; Holmes1993). The idea of creating and maintaining a secure base for learning and change became a key element of my consultancy methodology and teaching (see for example chapter 10). In chapter 7 I describe my critical engagement with this concept in order to develop practices to sustain my inquiry.

Attachment and group relations research and practice were useful in providing a means to think holistically and systemically about human relationships within organisations, and in providing tools to work with unconscious dynamics in relation to leadership and authority. Both have been criticised for their failure to explore the nature of power relations between genders, races or classes (Berman 1994; Hoggett 1996). Within their associated communities of practice I explored gender relations, and experienced the power of projection onto women who took up leadership roles. However I found little interest either in exploring or conceptualizing women to women dynamics within these communities of practice.

In later stages of my inquiry, case studies 2 and 3 (chapters 10 and 11), I drew from feminist and relational psychoanalytic research to conceptualise the intersubjective field between women, and the relational work which I developed in my feminist consultancy practice (Benjamin 1993,1995; Orbach and Eichenbaum 1994; Stern 1998). I wove research from these sources together with the political perspectives of postcolonial feminists Anzaldua (1999) and Lugones (1997) to theorise the politics of intersubjectivity in the context of feminist organisation consultancy.

Throughout my inquiry I engaged with feminist organisation research; I refer to these sources in more detail as they arise in my inquiry. In the following I have selected from these references to illustrate the range of these sources.

I sought out research on gender relations (Calas and Smircich 1996; Cockburn 1991; Itzin and Newman 1995, Meyerson and Kolb 2000; Mills and Tacred 1992; and on women managers in organisations (Gherardi 1995; Marshall 1995, 1984; Sheppard 1989; Sinclair 1998; Wajman 1998). I sought out research about the specific experience of black and lesbian women (Bravette 1996; Calvert and Ramsey 1996; Hall 1989), and on sexuality in organisations (Hearn et al 1989). As my inquiry progressed I became less interested in analysis of gender difference and behavioral accounts of women's leadership, and more interested in accounts of how gender is constructed through interactions and symbolism in organisations. I illustrate this interest in my review of selected texts in chapter 8.

At the end of my inquiry (chapters 11 and 12) I reflect on the challenge of moving from gendering organisational analysis to gendering organisational practice (Meyerson and Kolb 2000).

I read and selectively critiqued this literature - referencing it to my inquiry concerns as they unfolded. Through this approach to texts I sought to maintain responsibility for directing and constructing inquiry questions and method grounded in my life process (Marshall 1992, 1999) and to guard against swamping or seeking conformity in pre-given agendas (Reason and Marshall 2000).

Feminist Epistemology

As a feminist I wished to acknowledge, contribute and draw from debates within feminist research. This however was not straightforward.

To gain an overview of current debates I took part in feminist research conferences[2], read current issues of women's studies journals, and explored edited collections of feminist research literature on methodology and epistemology, for example those edited by Alcoff and Potter (1993), and Maynard and Purvis (1994). I discussed methodological issues

[2] National UK Women's Studies Network conferences, 1997 and 1999; Gender, Work and Organisation National conference, Manchester 1998

with members of a feminist research support group with whom I met regularly over a period of three years, and discussed research into women's self-organisation.

In common with Burton and Regan (1994), I found much of the literature on feminist research methodology challenging and fascinating, but difficult to relate to the practice of my research. Key debates concerned epistemological questions such as the im/possibility of a general theory of knowledge; the power relationship between researchers and researched; the place of subjectivity in research practice and knowledge claims; the relationship between theory and practice, and the basis of validity claims. As Maynard and Purvis (1994) note, few of these texts explore the dynamics of actually doing research in the field (1994 p.1).

In the rest of this subsection I engage briefly and selectively with key epistemological themes that did inform my research approach. In the following subsections I return to methodological principles and practices.

One key debate with which I engaged concerned the merits of claiming a specific epistemological standpoint for women (Harding 1987, 1991, 1993; Haraway 1991). Advocates for this stance have argued that because women and other marginalised groups are outside the dominant patriarchal power regime, through which claims to knowledge are validated, they are in a position of 'epistemic privilege.' From this position they are able to reveal unexamined questions and assumptions held by the epistemologically privileged, thus producing more partial and less distorted accounts (Harding 1991, 1993).

Feminist standpoint epistemology has been critiqued on several different grounds. Black and lesbian feminist researchers challenge white feminist attempts to construct a single 'women's standpoint' and assert that feminist perspectives are multiple, grounded in differing experiences of oppression and theoretical foundations (Collins 1991; hooks 1981, 1991; Reinharz 1992). Hooks' (1991) research rebels against the oppressive boundaries set by class sex or race. She redefines the margins as a 'space of radical openness', 'a profound edge', from which to develop a particular way of seeing reality 'from the outside in and from the inside out' (hooks 1984, preface, quoted hooks 991 p.149). In this 'politics of location,' marginality becomes a site of radical possibility, of resistance, of moving 'out of place'; a ground in which colonised and colonisers might meet and join as allies in resistance:

> This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category coloniser/colonised. Marginality is a site of resistance. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators (1991: 152).
>
> Colonisers who take up this invitation must give up the 'othering' of the colonised which invites them to speak only in voices of deprivation, silencing their voices of resistance, and dare to join with them within their sites of resistance. Sustaining this position on the margin requires a community to nourish ones' capacity to resist, to sustain the struggle of memory against forgetting, and to name the location from which we come into voice (1991: 146).

In my inquiry I struggled with the pain of remembering, to bring suppressed parts of myself into voice, and to resist suppressing inner voices that represented rejected parts of myself. I was sustained in this by my community of inquiry, and by the feminist research group of which I was a member. My struggle was another facet of the struggle to sustain resistance with and for women with whom I worked. I had to accept the limitations of collaboration as they emerged, set by the environments in which we worked and the strategies adopted by the women who were my clients and colleagues. I relived these struggles as I wrote my case studies, drawing from feminist and action research epistemological and methodological principles to sustain me in this work.

I drew upon the politics of location and of standpoint to conceptualise these challenges within my consultancy practice. I created spaces and within them invited women to enter into dialogue from their different locations, drawing on situated knowledge and practice to build common ground (chapters 11 and 12). Using the notion of 'epistemic community' (Nelson 1993) I conceptualised transfer of knowledge generated by women in these spaces, within gendered power regimes (chapter 12).

Haraway addresses these epistemological challenges when she explores the tension between feminist versions of objectivity, and of the radical multiplicity of local knowledges (1991:187).

She asserts 'feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges' (p. 188). From her perspective, knowledge cannot be read off identity or position (p. 193), but must be constructed through:

> ...partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of a web of connections called solidarity in politics and conversations in epistemology (p.191), including the ability to translate knowledges among very different and power differentiated communities (p.187).

In developing my inquiry methodology I have been concerned with the processes for surfacing partial, locatable, critical knowledges held by women, and for building and sustaining this web of connections between them. To develop and conceptualise these processes I have drawn inspiration from the politics and principles of feminist epistemology and research, while developing practices rooted within the principles and methods of action inquiry.

Extended epistemology

In my inquiry I cycled between multiple forms of knowing, and multiple conceptual frames. These were often associated with different power regimes, in organisational, professional and personal worlds. The process posed political, professional and conceptual challenges. In order to work with these challenges I developed an extended epistemology.

I drew this extended epistemology from the four different ways of knowing used within co-operative inquiry (Heron and Reason 2000). These are experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing. Validity is claimed where congruence between them can be demonstrated. In the following I draw from Heron and Reason's account and to elaborate how I used the concepts to support validity claims in my inquiry (Heron and Reason 2000 p. 183).

Experiential knowing refers to 'knowing through direct face to face encounter with person, place or thing. It is characterised by the immediacy of perceiving, through empathy and resonance. In my inquiry I extend this notion to include embodied and emotional knowing. Presentational knowing refers to the first form of expressing meaning by drawing on imagery through sound, movement, speech and so on. In my inquiry I adapt this term to refer to the politics of how to represent other forms of knowing within organisational environments in which specific forms of knowing are privileged. I illustrate these political issues in chapter 10 and theorise them further in chapter 12. Propositional knowing refers

to knowing 'about' something through theories and ideas, expressed in informative statements. In my inquiry this refers to conceptual knowledge, developed through inquiry practices from practical or experiential knowledge. Practical knowing refers to knowing how to do something, and is expressed in a skill or competence (Heron 1992, 1996, cited in Heron and Reason 2000).

In each chapter of my inquiry I describe how I cycled between these different forms of knowing, and how in the closing cycles of each inquiry track I sought congruence between them. Thus in my second case study, where I explore this process in detail, the first stages of inquiry were concerned with developing practical knowledge. In later stages I engaged colleagues in conceptualising knowledge embedded and enacted in the practical knowing developed through the project. This required consideration of the politics of how to re-present the knowledge we had generated and conceptualised in organisational environments that favoured different forms of knowing. In the process we had to negotiate the power dynamics triggered by our different positioning in relation to these dilemmas. To do this I drew from embodied and emotional knowing. Participants in the project final evaluation event acknowledged the importance of experiential, practical and propositional knowing. Thus my use of this extended epistemology enabled me to name and honour ways of knowing which reached beyond the positivist forms of knowledge privileged in the organisational environments in which my consultancy projects were based.

Relational knowing

Marshall notes that relational work can be defined from a number of conceptual systems (1999). In my inquiry I have drawn from feminist organisational researchers' use of the term to name the work of maintaining and sustaining relationships which I have documented in my inquiry.

Fletcher (1998) elaborates a model of relational practice, which she describes as a feminist reconstruction of work. She argues that in the organisation where her research was carried out, these relational practices were not valued or considered real work, and that qualities such as autonomy, tangible outcomes and short-term results were favoured. Moreover as Marshall notes in her commentary these practices were interpreted as

personal traits such as emotional need or powerlessness, and conflated with images of femininity or motherhood such as being helpful or good listeners (Marshall 1999).

As in Fletcher's research, in the organisations in which my clients worked there was no way of accrediting relational activity as an achievement in its own right. In my second case study I explored the challenges this posed for sustaining collaboration and for asserting the value of our inquiry based work methods (chapter 10). Throughout my inquiry I used the term to refer to both the detailed negotiations of inter-subjective dynamics between women with whom I worked, and to the inner work I did of engaging with different selves, in order to bring myself into a different voice.

Connected Knowing

I have said that through my inquiry I arrived at a different sense of self, in relationship to others. Relational practices were key to the methodology through which I achieved this. These were reflection and dialogue; engaging with inner world voices, then moving my attention outwards to engage with others. In the process I arrived at a different relationship between inner selves, bringing a more integrated sense of self in to my professional practice, and introducing more dialogue into my relationships with others.

I recognised many of the characteristics of this process in concept of the connected knowing developed by Belenky et al (1986) and Clinchy (1996). Through extensive research with women students of diverse backgrounds and social identities in the US, they mapped five major epistemological perspectives used by women in different contexts and at different points in their lives (1986: 207). The fifth of these, 'constructed knowledge', acknowledges that there are multiple ways of knowing and methods of analysis. Many of these women use passionate or 'connected knowing'. Dialogue is at the centre of this form; intimate knowledge of the self enables women using it to listen to others without silencing their own voice (1986: 218).

In chapters 8 and 9, I describe a form of deep engagement with written sources, and with my contributors. Using my experience and subjectivity as an instrument, I 'get inside' their material, in order to understand and make sense of it. I then develop methodological tools for maintaining a distinction between my sense making and the meanings embedded in the data or brought by contributors. These are based on the concept of inquiry in action,

systematic investigation through reflective practices of what issues I bring to my inquiry, and may be seeking to express or resolve through it.

In her subsequent writing on connected knowing Clinchy describes connected knowing as a rigorous, deliberate and demanding procedure, distinct from subjectivism (1996:209). It involves using the self as instrument of understanding, recognition of the self in other while maintaining an ability to see them as distinct. Connected knowing is thus an intersubjective procedure, through which to engage in dialogue with a text, a person, and idea, or the self, while maintaining a sense of both realities.

In my inquiry maintaining this tension between individuality and close connection posed challenges that proved to be a core theme in my life process and consultancy inquiry tracks. In my inquiry I developed practices that enabled me to identify the issues and actively engage with them, drawing from different conceptual frames as my inquiry developed.

Feminist and relational psychoanalysts are concerned with representations of self and other in interaction as distinct but related beings, and make a distinction between subject to subject and subject to object interactions (Benjamin 1990, 1995). Feminist research on women's friendships, which draws from relational psychoanalysis, makes a similar distinction between separated and merged attachment (Orbach and Eichenbaum 1994).

In my case studies I used these concepts to theorise challenges which arose within my feminist consultancy, and to analyse my successful and failed attempts to hold onto distinct and different positions within dialogue (chapters 9 -11). In chapter 12 I conceptualise these dynamics in detail, and identify 'flashpoints' where breakdown in feminist collaboration is most likely to occur. I elaborate and conceptualise the methodological tools that I developed in my inquiry to sustain subject to subject interactions, and in my 'Red Threads' locate them in their political context.

Systemic Analysis; Agentic Practice

In my inquiry I focused on form, pattern and structure of interactions, and on how these were informed by and informed institutional mechanisms of power. I sought balance in my analysis between developing an understanding of the material structures of discrimination

and oppression, and of how these were enacted or reworked through conscious or unconscious choices.

Many years ago I saw a play by Athol Fugard, the South African playwright, which made a great impression on me. In a certain scene his black male carer explains to the main character, a young white boy, that being white brings choices. He can choose whether to sit on the seat reserved for whites in the public park, or not. Listening to this exchange I experienced a powerful moment of learning: identity makes choices available concerning social positioning, but does not determine the choices that we make. We have places offered to us within the structures of privilege and oppression, but it is up to us how and where we position ourselves within them.

This balance between systemic analyses of power, and discovery and exploration of opportunities for enacting power or powerlessness differently, is one that I sought to maintain in my professional practice and in my inquiry. In developing my conceptual frame I drew from relational, psychodynamic and feminist organisation literature in order to develop an analysis that incorporated both dimensions. In each of my inquiry tracks, I show how I work in different ways with this tension, taking up more agentic positions in personal and professional relationships. This frequently involved a shift from analyses that in focusing primarily on structures of oppression devalued and obscured opportunities for action. In my inquiry into consultancy development for example I explored opportunities for broadening my client base into more 'mainstream' organisations (chapter 4). In my third case study I explored how gendered power was reproduced systemically, and enabled women to explore opportunities for challenging and changing these patterns (chapter 11).

Enacting feminist action inquiry

In this section I illustrate the key concepts that informed how I enacted my feminist inquiry practices, and describe some of the key challenges that arose. This section leads into my description of my inquiry practices in the following section of this chapter.

Inquiry for me and for 'others'

As a feminist practitioner a core criteria of quality for my inquiry was to produce new knowledge that would sustain feminist practice. Yet my inquiry as it first developed kept returning to my individual issues. I experienced this as a methodological and political dilemma. I could not see how my inquiry process could be of practical use to women in other contexts.

Feminist political and research practice asserts that the personal is political, and on the basis of women's experience has challenged social science research paradigms. Many feminist researchers have challenged the notion of a universal subject on the basis of specificity of the knowing subject, and the hidden subjectivities that underpin positivist claims to knowledge. In contrast much feminist research is characterised by taking subjectivity into account (Code 1993). Few feminist researchers, however, seem to insert their own subjectivity into the text of their research. In the two UK National Women's Studies Network conferences I attended during my inquiry I found little to support my attempts to do so, or to link specific research studies to developing tools for feminist action.

.

In their account of working with graduate research students, Reason and Marshall say that 'all good research is for me, for us, and for them' (2000: 413). They found that many students initially formulated their chosen research subject as 'for them', and that the links with the individual life issues which drove their research were not immediately apparent, but emerged through a process of exploration (Marshall 1992; Reason and Marshall 2000). This process was complex, and likely to require students to explore attachment to deeply held values, to confront vulnerabilities and to engage with difficult personal dilemmas.

In chapters 1 and 3 I showed how the process of doing inquiry with others as part of the CARPP community enabled me to discover the personal meaning of my inquiry topic. The methodological tools that I developed enabled cross fertilisation between inquiry activities relating to my individual life issues and my professional practices.

In her research on women in organisations, Marshall spoke of being hounded by potentially negative audiences, or weighed down by expectations to speak and act for women (Marshall 1984, 1992). My research methods evoked intense feelings of

vulnerability, and necessitated constant review of boundary issues as I broke silence through my use of inquiry methods in my consultancy, and brought my inner voices into my research. Marshall (1999) referred to this process as an edge that needs awareness, weighing purpose with vulnerability. In my inquiry working with this edge brought the rewards of personal development as well as political rewards of access to data which would not otherwise have been available. I exercised care in how I referred to colleagues and clients in my thesis, seeking permission to use material from our discussions, and inviting feedback on draft text when I could do so without undermining my consultancy relationships. I explored these issues in more detail in case study 3 (chapter 11), and in relation to validity claims later in this chapter.

Reason and Marshall (2000) claim that this form of experiential, action orientated research is personal, working with life issues, and highly political, reflecting the inquirers passionate social viewpoint (Marshall 1992). My focus on subjectivity within my methodology provided both the means and an ongoing challenge for me to hold these two perspectives in tension. In developing my conceptual framework I explore the challenges of keeping both the personal and the political in the frame. I use the device of Red Threads to reinsert the political where this is in danger of being displaced by the 'personal' and subjective.

Through my inquiry I developed methods and tools for sustaining feminist collaboration within a wide range of practical feminist initiatives. I also developed the tools for developing and sustaining myself as an individual practitioner, and in doing so achieved a profound ontological shift, a different sense of myself in relation to others. In this sense my research has been an expression of my need to learn and to change, to shift some aspect of myself (Reason and Marshall 2000 p. 415). This aspect has concerned both personal and my professional identity; it has been a means for me to assert the value of my consultancy within my professional field, and also to arrive at more self-valuing. It has also been a political intervention, a claim for wider recognition of the value of feminist interventions in organisations and of the challenges of sustaining feminist working relationships.

Inquiry as life process

My inquiry took place over a period of four years during which my inquiry stance developed and changed in emphasis.

Marshall defines inquiry as life process as 'holding open the boundary between research and my life generally' (1999). She describes working with awareness that themes she is pursuing in research are also relevant to some other area of her life, and of the associated demands as well as potentially enriching qualities of this approach.

Through each cycle of my inquiry and in each inquiry track I brought aspects of myself into my consultancy identity that I had formerly split off and kept apart from the public arena. In this process I drew from feminist researchers and action inquiry to affirm my approach to research as life process (Marshall 1992, 1999, 2000; Reason 1994, 2000; Stanley and Wise 1983; Stanley 1997). The inquiry methodology I developed enabled and articulated this process and enriched my consultancy practice. In chapter 3 I described how this enabled a greater sense of agency and opened up different choices about my own positioning.

Within each cycle of inquiry I experienced disruptions and interruptions to my planned approach to my inquiry subject. In each case I responded to the unexpected and fashioned out of it a method that deepened my level of engagement with my inquiry subject. I allowed events within my life to interrupt my planned approach, and developed practices that transformed these interruptions into openings into deepening cycles of knowing (Marshall 1992, 1999, 2000). I illustrated and conceptualised this process in some detail in my inquiry into 'un/belonging' in chapter 7. In writing my case studies (chapters 9 -11) I allowed inner voices to interrupt the narratives I had planned to tell, and through engaging with them developed a new conceptual frame for my feminist consultancy (chapter 12).

Working with inner world material

In the first year of my inquiry I developed inquiry methods that engaged with my inner world. Through these early cycles of inquiry I made a deeper connection with the core of passion that infused my inquiry subject.

Marshall (1999) refers to inquiry themes becoming 'empty' or 'full' of energy; and to the passion brought by the deeply held values of researchers to the research process (1992). Allowing passion to shape my inquiry was an assertion of 'inner world' material as a form of experiential knowing, a contribution to new knowledge in the extended epistemology of participatory inquiry. In each of my case studies I allowed emotion to alert me to an aspect

of experience I had not addressed, which was in some way excluded, left out or denied by the assertions being made or accounts which were being given. I then engaged with the emotion I was experiencing, and from this position explored unspoken dynamics through dialogue and reflective practices. This method was important in action and reflective stages of my inquiry cycles. Thus as I sat down to write my second case study my response to inner voices became a lens through which I approached my material and conducted my analysis.

Through engaging with these inner voices I was able to access and introduce a range of emotions into my account, which, although part of the lived experience of myself and some of my colleagues and clients, were not explicitly discussed within the consultancy frame. These aspects of our experience of collaboration were central to my inquiry subject. The methods I developed to access them were therefore key to enabling me to access the data I needed.

Working with inner voices was demanding, both during cycles of consultancy activity and during phases of writing and reflection. It frequently involved working with embodied knowing, as emotion was expressed through bodily sensation, or somatised in physical symptoms. In my third case study, for example, I described how my colleague and I interpreted our embodied feelings of fear as a signal that we had entered dangerous territory our consultancy process. During the writing of my thesis I re-engaged with painful feelings of powerlessness and despair and through reflective practices re-worked them in order to re-conceptualise power dynamics with a colleague in this final cycle of my inquiry. This process took its toll on my health as I found myself re-experiencing powerful anxieties which blocked my writing.

In this work I was sustained by feminist and by psychodynamic research. I drew from feminist assertions of the importance of naming emotion and of subjectivity as it was experienced within the research process (Code 1993; Stanley and Wise 1983). In her research on women managers, Marshall names the dangers of exploring some territories of experience (1995). Gatenby and Humphries (1999) cite these dangers in their exploration of ethical dilemmas associated with breaking or respecting silence, in their role as teachers and researchers. In naming these dilemmas I saw that they had meaning beyond the specific relationships from which they arose; they belonged to the politics of the research, and to the methodology I had developed.

In the consultancy I describe in my case studies I used inquiry as a method to introduce dialogue into conflictual relationships. To do this I had to move out of sense making frames that allocated blame, and find alternative ways of conceptualising the powerful emotions I had experienced. This meant moving into an observer role in relation to my inner world; in touch with emotions and able to draw from them as a source of data, but not speaking directly from or being limited by them.

This practice resembled a form of listening developed by psychoanalysts 'listening with the third ear' to their analysands (Reik 1948, quoted in Rowan and Reason 1981). When working in this way, analysts suspend their propositional thinking in order to engage with the analysand in a different state of consciousness, and to 'listen to the music behind the words.'

In their research on what enabled transformational learning to take place in psychoanalytic practice, relational psychoanalysts identified 'moments of connection' associated with shifts in consciousness. These were moments when potential for reciprocal learning was experienced (Stern 1998). In my inquiry I identified similar 'moments' where transformational learning took place in relationship to colleagues and clients. In these moments of deep connection 'subject to subject' dialogue was sustained.

This concept of transformation through moments of connection through interaction is central to my inquiry methodology. I illustrate these moments of transformational learning in my analysis of interview discussions (chapter 6), in my inquiry into un/belonging (chapter 7), and in my second case study (chapter 10).

Conceptualising inquiry

My inquiry process was multi-layered. Representing this in my thesis was challenging, as earlier cycles of activity tended to disappear, displaced by later cycles of conceptual activity. This 'disappearing' raised the question of 'what counts as inquiry?' as I crafted my thesis. How far back in my activities should I go, in my accounts? At what point did my 'real' inquiry begin?

This issue took different forms as I crafted each chapter. In my case studies I noted that inquiry moved from background to foreground of my account, in relation to consultancy activities. In each case study, I was challenged by my supervisor to expand my definition

of 'inquiry' outwards, as I was encouraged to name more of my activities as inquiry. This process brought into clearer focus how I had used reflective practices at early and later stages of each consultancy contract. It enabled me to articulate the demands of processing difficult emotion and successive cycles of conceptualisation as I invited and worked with feedback on draft text. I was able to give more weight to the politics and ethics of how I dealt with boundary issues, in deciding what data to include, how to represent challenging interactions, who my audience was, and whether and how to take account of their likely responses. Through naming these issues as I engaged with them I gave more weight to my inquiry process.

Crafting the thesis as a whole took place in several stages. I streamlined each chapter editing out repetition and made substantial reductions in length. I selected material and devised a form that aimed to represent the scope of my inquiry within the thesis, the process through which I developed my methodology, and the quality of my sense making process. I added an extended introduction and two chapters relating to my consultancy development through inquiry, and to my personal journey through inquiry. The decision to add these was a response to my supervisor's challenge to do more justice to the scope of my inquiry, to include autobiographical material and political positioning which would ground my inquiry more clearly in its personal and political context.

Enacting feminist action research principles

In her exploration of how feminisms have grounded and informed action research, Maguire finds that despite many similarities there are only rare instances where action research and feminist theory engage with each other. In this section I comment briefly on each of the themes she identified in her discussion with feminist action researchers.

Studying women or studying gender?

Action researchers problematise the systematic relations of power in the production of knowledge. Feminists place gender, as well as other categories of oppression, at the centre of their systemic analysis (Maguire p. 62).

Women and the relationships between them are the subject of my action inquiry. While, as Maguire points out, much feminist scholarship has shifted away from studying women towards a study of gender relations, others see the need to defend women's studies as a discipline on the basis that women's lives merit study in their own right, and that women's

studies as an academic discipline should not have to compete for resources or validity with gender studies (WSN 1999; 2000).

My inquiry is positioned firmly in the latter camp. My purpose is to research the dynamics of women's inter-relationships, and to assert the value of this field of study in its own right, in order to support women's political initiatives, and in order to support my feminist professional practice.

Multiple identities, interlocking oppressions

Analysis of the complex dynamics of interlocking oppressions pervades black and lesbian feminist scholarship; this acknowledges differently located knowledge, and the varied ways in which women describe and experience their worlds (Maguire p. 62).

In my research I am concerned primarily with differences between women arising from organisational location and power. While race and sexual identities are not my primary referent I do explore how they inform and shape relationships in my consultancy and inquiry (chapters 9, 10).

Black and post colonialist feminist scholars often use the notion of multiple identities, and of travelling between different worlds, to conceptualise strategies of resistance to oppression grounded in social identities such as race, class and sexuality (Anzaldua 1999; Bravette 2000; hooks 1991; Lugones 1997). They developed notions of 'bi-culturalism' (Bravette 2000) and of 'world travelling' (Lugones 1997) to explore the skills associated with moving between different communities of affiliation and oppression.

In my research I develop the notion of multiple identities and of differently situated knowledge to explore how organisational power dynamics and positioning shapes knowledge claims, and how these differences in turn undermine or assist feminist collaboration (chapters 9, 10, 11). I draw from these to explore, articulate and conceptualise the experience of moving between collaborative spaces I have created for women with whom I was working, and their organisational environments (chapter 12).

Voice and silence

The metaphor of 'voice' has been used in a variety of different ways in feminist and action research (Maguire p. 62). In my inquiry feminist political practice and the experience of psychoanalysis both influenced my use of these terms.

Feminist research and political practice have linked coming into voice to a sense of empowerment for women (Belenky et al 1986). As women gain a sense of themselves as generators of knowledge, multiple perspectives and diverse opinions are appreciated and no longer experienced as a threat. There is then potential to understand that knowledge is constructed, not given; contextual not absolute; mutable, not fixed (1986:10).

In my inquiry the practice of listening to inner voices has been central as a method for sustaining my self through inquiry, and as a method of analysis of my findings. The process of integrating different voices through doing this inquiry has empowered me in my professional and personal practice.

In my case studies I show how my consultancy practice enabled women to 'break silence', and on this basis to challenge gendered power in their organisations. I describe the dilemmas and challenges associated with this process. I reflect on the political and ethical dilemmas associated with being a breaker of silence, where silence may have been a chosen survival strategy for myself, and for the women with whom I worked (Red Thread 4).

Everyday experience, grounded inquiry

Feminist scholarship and practice has prioritised women's direct experience and on this basis challenged male 'truths'. Feminist action research seeks to connect the articulated, contextualised personal with the often hidden or invisible structural and social institutions that define and shape our lives (Maguire p. 64/5).

My inquiry was grounded in my experience of doing feminist consultancy. It conceptualised material generated through action inquiry with women clients and colleagues over a four-year period. I aimed to validate women as producers of new knowledge about gendered power, drawing from my inquiry practice and life experience.

I discovered in the process of doing inquiry that I also had to address the issue of how to sustain myself as a practitioner. My inquiry into women in organisations was interrupted by financial and emotional life crises; I explored how these issues and my sense making of them interwove with my inquiry within my professional practice. This process became part of my inquiry and informed the development of my methodology.

Power and participation

Feminist and action researchers both seek to unsettle and change power relations, structures and mechanisms in the social world and within social science research. Many feminist researchers have argued that knowledge is grounded in specific context; furthermore that the researcher is an active presence engaged in a political process of constructing a viewpoint (Maguire 2000; Stanley 1993). In my inquiry I explored how my own location and those of my contributors informed our working relationships and our sense making throughout my inquiry. In this sense my methodology is feminist and grounded action research.

A key feminist influence on action research has been the restructuring of the research process itself, turning research relationships inside out by promoting the approach of co-researchers (Maguire 64/65).

In my inquiry power relationships between contributors and myself were complex, due partly to the consultancy relationships in which much of my inquiry was embedded, and partly to my inquiry subject and methods. The skill of balancing a commitment to power sharing with a realistic appraisal of what is appropriate and possible has been at the heart of my inquiry practice. For example in my case studies I describe how working with my inner voices brought parts of my self into my inquiry which would it would not have been safe to bring into my consultancy relationships. This raised ethical and professional dilemmas about how to represent painful issues that were at the centre of my inquiry. In considering these I had to balance my political purpose with personal and professional vulnerabilities. I discussed these with my inquiry group, and explore them in more detail in my case studies.

Inviting feedback from clients and colleagues on text was not on the whole an appropriate form for testing my analysis. While I shared draft text of the second case study with my client, this was on the basis of trust build within our friendship than on the basis of our professional relationship. Thus while my inquiry has been dialogic and interactive, and has invited joint sense making, this has been within parameters I have set within each inquiry cycle, and I have not felt it appropriate to seek fuller forms of collaboration.

My inquiry practices

In this section I introduce my inquiry practices and show how they are rooted in the wider communities of action and action inquiry research.

Within the CARPP community I was introduced to a wide range of inquiry practices. From practical experience and conceptual accounts of these practices, I developed my own. My inquiry is conducted through the cycles of action and reflection and extended epistemology of participatory inquiry (Reason 1988, 1996, 2000). I drew from the attentional disciplines of action inquiry (Torbert 2000; Torbert and Fisher 1992) and the self-reflective inquiry practices developed by Marshall (Marshall 1999, 2000).

In the following I provide a brief introduction to my inquiry practices. I refer respectively to inquiry conducted on my own, with other individuals, or in an organisational context (Reason and Bradbury 2000; Torbert 2000. I used these in combinations appropriate to stages of development reached within each inquiry track.

These practices were elaborated within each cycle of inquiry and are described more fully at the beginning of each chapter of my thesis. The brief descriptions that follow are intended to provide a framework for these more detailed accounts

Maintaining purpose: cycles of action and reflection

In it's classic form action research moves back and forth between action and reflection. This might take the form of planning to engage in some form of action, becoming immersed in the chosen territory in an appropriate way, reflecting on what has been experienced and done and later moving on to plan another cycle of action and engagement (Marshall 2000: 434; Rowan 2000:117).

However this account implies a relationship between intent and planning which was not always the case in my inquiry. While my inquiry developed through cycles of reflection and action, they were not always planned in advance; often I abandoned plans that I had made, because the focus of my inquiry had shifted or been displaced by events. At times my inquiry seemed to take on a life and form of its own, as I let go of my planned inquiry

activities, and allowed the life issues which were preoccupying me to move into the foreground. Sometimes, as in my inquiry into 'Un/belonging', the interruption seemed to present an opportunity to initiate inquiry into issues of immediate relevance to my subject. In this case I embraced these events with conscious intent to make them part of my inquiry (chapter 7). At other times time I continued to think of my inquiry into life events as distraction or preparation for my 'real' inquiry into organisational work-based issues, despite encouragement from my supervisor and inquiry group to make the links. This struggle continued up to the near final drafting of my thesis, when I finally accepted that this 'personal' inquiry work did indeed contribute to my inquiry into feminist consultancy with women in organisations, and should therefore be included in my thesis.

Writing this, I am reminded of Marshall's account of being both active and receptive (2000: 434) as complementary strategies for dealing with uncertainties, drawing from Bakan's account of agency and communion. In my inquiry practices I held in balance receptiveness to inner voices which were 'not allowed' to speak in professional roles, with action to challenge or otherwise engage with them, to test or enact some form of interaction or practical activity in the external world.

A feature of my inquiry method has been a capacity to go with events, maintaining focus while retaining an open mind on how to enact my inquiry.
Throughout my inquiry I maintained a strongly rooted sense of purpose. This sprang from political passion, and a deepening sense of personal transformation. Resilience was necessary to navigate high levels of anxiety associated with professional and financial insecurities, and changes in my personal life. My inquiry practices became a method for addressing these issues resourcefully, and for critically engaging with my subjectivity within my inquiry process.

Attentional skills and reflective practices

Critical engagement with subjectivity is at the core of my inquiry methodology, and a key skill in the consultancy methods I developed for sustaining feminist collaboration. In previous sections of this chapter I introduced the conceptual base from which I drew within my thesis to theorise the practical issues and associated skills. But what were the attentional skills used for critically engaging with my subjectivity within my inquiry practice to access the data?

Action inquiry as developed by Torbert (1991, 2000) uses the notion of 'attentional skills' to refer to the practice of observation of the self in action. Practitioners of action inquiry develop a sharper sense of consciousness in action, offering opportunities for 'amendment of tactics (single loop learning)' or 'a broader reconstruction of life strategies (double loop learning)' (Torbert 2000: 250). Torbert envisions a world in which these practices are integrated into personal, relational and organisational lives:

> This living inquiry seeks to integrate subjectivity, intersubjectivity and objectivity in moment to moment and lifelong actions that are timely and potentially transformational.
> (2000: 258)

My inquiry practices are based on the principle of self-observation in action, and as I show throughout my inquiry have been transformational in relation to my own life, and in certain cases for others. My attentional skills were developed through successive cycles of inquiry and are described in detail in each chapter. In the following I use Torbert's three categories of inquiry practice to provide a brief summary:

'First Person Practices': inquiry with self

These practices were concerned to sustain and enable development of my awareness of how I made meaning of life events, of how this shaped my assessment of scope for change in my life choices, and through my feminist consultancy practice. They fall into the categories of grounding, sustaining, attentional, and sense making skills. They were solitary, but informed my inquiry with others. I used them in different combinations at different stages of each inquiry track.

Through autobiographical writing, I became more aware of the ontological and political grounding of my chosen inquiry subject. This brought me more closely into touch with the situated and located nature of my inquiry, and enabled me to develop inquiry practices through which I addressed my developmental needs alongside my inquiry into the dynamics between women in organisations.

I became skilled at enabling moments of connection with others who sustained and grounded my inquiry, by affirming its value as feminist consultancy and inquiry and as life process. I used email, face to face and telephone contact. The daily morning ritual of

swimming or tai chi cleared my head, enabled me to focus on the inquiry theme for the day, and invited ideas to flow, grounding me in a sense of connection with my inner selves. Physical movement built a sense of 'can do' and helped to move through writing block when thesis writing was my main activity.

I developed reflective practices that sharpened my awareness of myself in action and interaction with others. I moved my attention inwards and outwards, a process described by Marshall as cycling between inner and outer arcs of attention (Marshall 1999, 2000). Through free association, a skill developed as an analysand and as a practitioner, I used dreams and affective states to make associations between issues I was exploring in my consultancy relationships and relationships with family and friends. In early cycles of inquiry autobiographical work enabled me to identify patterns in my interpretation of current and past experience (chapters 1, 3 and 4), and this provided grounding for developing inquiry practices and for exercising judgement in how to direct my inquiry in organisational contexts. Through reflective practices and dialogue with others I developed strategies for changing some of these patterns. I illustrated this process in the chapters 4 and 8.

Writing was a means both for documenting this process, and a primary means of doing it. Journal writing was essential at early stages of each inquiry track. I selected from this rich ' thick description' to identify and begin to conceptualise emergent themes (Geertz 1973, quoted in Marshall 2000). Through reflection and discussion with members of the CARPP inquiry group I assessed the quality of my engagement with these themes and exercised critical judgement about which tracks to develop. I drew from research literature and discussion in my inquiry group to formulate inquiry questions, and to plan further inquiry initiatives. I used journal writing throughout to track my self in action.

I worked with different combinations of these processes in each inquiry track. These are described in the methodology sections of each chapter.

In the final year of my inquiry thesis writing was my main activity and this became the medium for further inquiry cycles. I re-engaged with challenging political and professional dilemmas, and in order to find a generative position from which to write, re-processed and re-conceptualised painful emotional material.

'Second Person Practices': inquiry with others

As my inquiry developed I increasingly introduced more reflective, dialogic approaches within family (chapter 3) and within consultancy inter-actions (chapters 10 and 11). The CARPP inquiry group was an important forum for learning these skills. My first person inquiry sustained this process, enabling me to model awareness in action in relation to others.

Torbert identified four 'parts of speech' associated with his inquiry practice and suggests that paying attention to balance in use of each can enable mutually transforming action inquiry (2000). These were framing: declaring or making explicit intent or vision; advocating: setting a goal, recommending a strategy or making a claim; illustrating: offering an account based on actual performance or activity; inquiring: inviting feedback. I made efforts to invite inquiry in personal and professional interactions by being more explicit about my own conceptual and political framing; and attempting to hold in tension my impulse to advocate with invitations to exchange feedback, discuss and jointly reflect on process. In my inquiry I explored what happened when I attempted to work in this way, and what contributing factors led to generative or degenerative exchange.

Through this face to face inquiry I tested and developed sense making initiated in first person inquiry practices. I invited critical feedback on inquiry writing and tested my current thinking in discussion with friends, colleagues with feminist researchers and in my CARPP inquiry group. I used this feedback in planning next steps for my inquiry. I made inquiry thinking a basis for opening up choices for action, and inter-action (Reason and Bradbury 2000; Torbert 2000).

'Third Person Practices': inquiry for organisational change

My second person inquiry in organisational contexts was designed as a method for change intervention. In chapter 11 I describe my use of inquiry groups in the first phase of a gender culture change intervention, and of how organisational resistance was enacted. In chapters 10 and 11, I show how through dialogue with clients I shifted oppositional dynamics and enabled different joint narratives to emerge. This opened up new perspectives on strategies we were developing for change, and on gendered power dynamics within the client organisations. In appendix 2 I provide a summary of the inquiry based change intervention which I developed.

Within each cycle of inquiry, reflection and action took on different forms, appropriate to the stages of development within each track, and according to external circumstance. For example, I engaged in concentrated periods of reflection sometimes in relation to action, at other times in relation to literature. This led at times to periods of conceptual activity, at other times to periods of practical activity within my consultancy. I adapted my focus of activity and inquiry practices to the constraints set by time, personal and professional context, and physical location of my inquiry.

New knowledge was generated in the movement between these different forms of action and reflection. Within my professional practice, inquiry became a means for introducing reflective practices into my consultancy. For participants adapted to organisational environments which devalued reflection and placed a high value on output related activity this posed political and professional challenges. In my case studies I show how these challenges were in turn sometimes enacted within my consultancy relationships (chapters 19, 10, 11) and how my inquiry then became a means of conceptualising practices that had been jointly developed in earlier cycles of inquiry.

Quality in my Inquiry

In this final section I pose questions which I would ask the reader to use in considering my claims to quality in my inquiry.

Reason and Marshall (2000) note the power of belief that there is an external authority that holds the key to the correct methodology for their research topic. In tune with the principles of feminist and of action research described above, I was challenged by them to become the source of my own knowing and to fashion my own tools in order make my own knowledge claims. To do this I drew from the living experience of doing inquiry that was enacted and conceptualised in my inquiry group and in wider discussion in the CARPP community (chapters 3, 4, 7).

Epistemological and conceptual frame

In my inquiry I sought to name and conceptualise multiple forms of knowing, and to track congruence and divergence between them. I used notions of situated and located knowledge drawn from feminist epistemology to theorise aspects of my practice, and to plan action interventions. I adapted an extended epistemology to validate knowledge claims in my consultancy and in my thesis.
Did I illustrate sufficiently how I drew from these different forms of knowing, to substantiate my knowledge claims?

In order to develop my conceptual frame I drew together concepts from diverse research sources and communities of practice.
Did I illustrate my creative use of concepts from these sources in order to maintain balance between personal, organisational, business and political perspectives? Did I adequately conceptualise the links and cross fertilisation between processes of personal, political and organisational transformation, as I cycled between different communities of research and practice?

Subject to subject interaction

Did I distinguish adequately between what belonged to me, and what belonged to others who contributed to my inquiry?

In my analysis of my interview findings I developed a methodology that compared my experience to the patterns described by with contributors to my interviews. These interviews were conducted as joint discussions, using a topic guide drawn from my own experience and issues. In my analysis I referred to a sense of feeling affirmed in these discussions through my discovery of a shared territory of experience. This did not mean that our experience was the same, or that we agreed on our analysis of it, but suggested a shared ground within which we named variations of pattern.

My claim to quality is based on my detailed exploration of how my subjectivity and experience informed my approach to the subject and my analysis of the findings. I developed inquiry practices that enabled me to name and conceptualise the relationship

between 'me' and 'them' and to identify the challenges of sustaining subject: subject dialogue. This became a core cross cutting theme of my inquiry. I conceptualised the challenges and practices I developed for working with it by drawing from feminist and psychodynamic research literature (chapters 7, 8 and 12). In this sense I claim I developed rigorous procedures for validity in my use of 'connected knowing' (Clinchy 1996).

Tools for feminist transformation

My feminist action inquiry was inspired by a desire for transformational change within my personal, professional, and social interactions.
Have I sufficiently demonstrated the depth and range of my personal process, and how this cross-fertilised and engaged with my professional practice, and political goals?

In my inquiry I set out to fashion conceptual and practical tools to sustain feminist collaboration and professional practice. To do this I have sought to use my inquiry to enrich my consultancy practice, and to draw from my lived experience of my consultancy practice to provide data for my inquiry.
Did I provide sufficient evidence that my inquiry has:

- Affirmed and developed women's knowing by creating spaces, conditions and practices that encouraged women to engage with each other across different positions, histories, cultures and identities (Maguire 2000; Reason 1994, 2000)
- Enacted change through cycles of action and reflection, enabling women to understand their part in enacting, and capacity to actively challenge and transform, gendered power regimes, through development of new practices based on new knowing (Maguire 2000; Marshall 1984, 1992,1995; Reason and Bradbury 2000;Torbert 1991, 1992, 2000)
- Supported feminist collaboration by providing the tools for feminists to develop inquiry based approaches, and by sustaining 'subject / subject' interactions to enact feminist values and goals (Maguire 2000)
- Sustained the individual feminist practitioner as she moved between multiple conceptual and political frames

Transferability: between mainstream and margins

Through my inquiry I set out to reposition my consultancy practice out of the margins of 'equal opportunities' and into the 'mainstream' of organisational development (chapter 4). In the course of my inquiry my notions of mainstream and margins loosened; as I became more centred in my own practice I felt less marginalised, better able to assert it's value and to adapt its methods in a range of different environments.

Is my inquiry methodology and conceptual frame sufficiently grounded in specific context to make sense, yet sufficiently explicit about its general principles to be transferable to other contexts? Does it provide methods that can be used to sustain feminist consultancy, and which might also be transferable to more 'mainstream' organisation development initiatives?

For me and for us; for us and for them

While my overall inquiry has been a self-driven process, it has also been informed by numerous discussions with feminist practitioners and researchers. With them I have tested ideas, checked for resonance of my core themes, and received confirmation that these issues were widely shared.

In writing my inquiry I had expected to come up with solutions for women - and for myself. As I began to bring more of my subjectivity into my inquiry I sometimes experienced the encouragement and interest in my research expressed by women clients and colleagues as a weighty responsibility. I began to anticipate their potential disapproval and disappointment in what I was actually producing, and recognised similarity in the vulnerability described by Marshall in her account of responses, anticipated and actual, to her research on women managers (Marshall 1984, 1992). The stance I have taken up through my inquiry may not be popular, nor the public exposure of difficult issues that although widely talked about between women rarely find their way into research publications.

The inquiry method I developed required me to set aside defences that I had constructed in my organisation consultancy persona; sharing material would have risked being negatively judged by women identified with 'mainstream' workplace cultures and

ideologies. In persisting to write my inquiry in this way I have had to wrestle with the question which has run throughout each cycle of inquiry: is this inquiry for me or for them? Does it do more than provide an account of my personal journey? Is there sufficient balance in my account, between celebration of the achievements of collaboration between women in mainstream organisations and adequate account of the challenges?

Finally, I re-pose the challenge enacted within each of my case studies: does my inquiry name the political and ethical challenges of holding the tension between generative adaptive strategies and feminist ways of being in mainstream environments?

For you?

To test these criteria I invited two colleagues to read and send critical feedback on drafts of case study 2 (chapters 10) and the chapter which theorises challenges to feminist collaboration (chapter 12). Of these Anne Scott is a feminist philosopher and activist who shares my interest in transfer of learning. The other is the friend and client who was lead partner on the ELP project described in case study 2. Both gave permission for me to include their emails in my thesis.

In their responses both state that they recognised elements of their own experience in my text, and furthermore, that reading the text had re-evoked this lived experience. Each of them expressed equally strong doubts that their or my experience could be validated as 'knowledge' in the mainstream of the academy.

In her email Anne describes the vulnerability evoked as she recognised aspects of her self that she would not bring into her academic research. Her strong reaction seemed to mirror my own powerful anxieties that I worked through in order to write my case studies:

> ***Your case study***
> *Have come back to work, and finally picked up your case study. It's an enormously powerful piece of writing. It set off all sorts of things for me... I think you are doing something very original, and very important, in regards to feminist epistemology. Writing that must have taken a great deal of courage!*

Am about to start on the other chapter, but thought I would share the above with you.

I made notes of some references that may, or may not, be helpful to you in the margins as I read. Will send them all to you after I finish both chapters. I don't really have any other comments to make on your case study itself. This is a style of writing, and of thinking that is well outside my expertise... I really wouldn't have any idea how to make it better!

Reading it brought up all sorts of feelings for me. Excitement and energy. A kind of activist passion. and also fear and uncomfortableness. As you've probably guessed by now, I'm not a person who feels very comfortable with my own vulnerabilities. Or with other people's, for that matter... that's why I like 'academic' writing. Even in its women's studies style, it tends to be distancing. So - reading your case study threw ME into a bit of a reflexive loop. Strong reactions. Then asking myself: 'Why am I reacting like that?' 'What's the issue for me here?' 'What am I scared of?' ... and so forth.

I kept thinking, 'We could just rewrite this to make it more academic, could foreground the method, could add references, could highlight theoretical issues, etc and etc'. ...And then suddenly recognizing, with a start, that doing too much of that would lose the essence of what YOU are trying to do! And moreover, that I wanted to do it so that I wouldn't have to face my own vulnerabilities. So on reflection, I think your case study is fine the way it is. The theoretical, distancing, bits can always be added somewhere else! Although I think you will need to choose your external & internal examiners very carefully if you want a PhD out of this. You mustn't have anybody who is too defended, and who will be scared out of their wits by all that emotion!

Anyway, just thought you might want some immediate reactions.

Will be in touch anon...
Love, Anne
Dr. Anne Scott
Lecturer in Women's Studies & Social Policy
Dept. of Applied Social Sciences
University of Bradford

In the second email my contributor affirmed both that she shared the emotional experience of the project work I described in my case study, and that working with this

emotion was an integral aspect of our working method. She also expresses doubt that this aspect of our lived experience could count as 'knowledge':

> ***Hello!***
> *I am half way through the first reading of the Case study. Very powerful! Very open amazing material made me cry in some parts.*
> .....
> *I had no idea you were working at that depth - I feel humbled!*
> *I want to read the whole thing !!!!!!!!!!!*
> *I am conscious of the effort pain exhilaration risk application focus commitment rigor involved. No wonder you are exhausted.*
> *You asked whether I think it misrepresents any aspect of our work. It IS how we worked in the larger project - that what was so refreshing.*
> *It's incredible that a form of academic research could include that material.*
> .....
>
> *Love, F*[i]

In their feedback both readers from their different perspectives affirmed that the experiences I described and conceptualised were jointly held, and furthermore that in the act of reading them, aspects of their own similar experiences were re-evoked. In reading them they became more keenly aware of aspects of experience that could not be claimed as knowledge, because it would expose them to vulnerability or because it was unthinkable as knowledge.

This response suggested a further cluster of criteria for quality in my inquiry: does it, in the act of reading, sharpen your awareness, as reader, of boundaries you have set to bringing your subjectivity into research or other professional arenas? Does it provoke thought about the generative or degenerative aspects of choices you may have made? Have I adequately considered the ethics and politics of breaking silence, or of coming into voice within my thesis? In considering these questions, has my sharing brought similar issues of your own to mind? Are we, as writer and reader, in dialogue now?

In Conclusion

Writing this inquiry has been intensely demanding of my physical, emotional and intellectual resources. During the writing process I experienced moments of satisfaction, joy, and pride in my achievement, as well as frustration and exhaustion and symptoms of illness. In the process I re-engaged with the difficult experiences of which I have been writing and through inquiry made new meaning and took up a different stance in relation to them.

Tracking this process within my inquiry enabled me to articulate my inquiry stance as it developed through my inquiry. I have emerged with a sharper sense of how my feminist political stance has informed my inquiry and consultancy practice with women, of how my research and biography have been closely interwoven. My inquiry has been and will continue to be 'life process' (Marshall 1992, 2000) in which methodology, epistemology and ontology are intertwined (Stanley 1997).

---

[i] F was a contributor to my interviews and the client to whom I refer in case study 2.

Section 1

Inquiry as life process

Grounding my Inquiry

In the following two chapters (3 and 4) I show how my inquiry into relationships between women developed from my professional practice, and is imbued with deeper meaning from my personal history. In writing them I explored the multiple levels of meaning which the terms 'mainstream' and 'margins' have held for me, and of how my inquiry process enabled me to re-position myself in relation to them.

The section is made up of three chapters.

In the first I explore the personal meaning of my inquiry into women in organisations, illustrating the ontological grounding of my inquiry (chapter 3).

In the second I describe how I worked with these themes in developing my consultancy business (chapter 4).

In the third I provide an overview of my inquiry, showing the development of each track and how they interlinked (chapter 5).

This page is a space for reflection and note taking, for cappuccino, or espresso...

Chapter 3

My Inquiry Journey 1

Margins or Mainstream?

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with a theme that runs throughout this inquiry: a quest for belonging and of recognition. It appears in different guises in my inquiry. Sometimes it is voiced by myself, as a yearning to belong (chapter 7), or as a deep desire for recognition (chapter 10). Sometimes it is voiced by other women, as reported in my analysis of interview based discussions (chapter 6), and in my research with women refugee managers (chapter 9).

In this chapter I explore its roots in my own biography. In it and in the following chapter I show how I develop inquiry practices to shift my personal sense of being marginal, and to take up positions within more 'mainstream' settings. I show how this led to a changing sense of self, related to a strengthened capacity to take up positions in mainstream spaces, without losing core elements of my political identity 'on the margins'.

This developmental theme is woven throughout the territories of my inquiry. In chapter 12 I conceptualise this emergent self as a feminist consultant who is travels between different worlds, crossing epistemological and political borders in order to take up positions in mainstream and marginal locations.

This chapter drew from material selected from my 'life process' inquiry track. These were journal notes, writing presented at twice termly visits to my CARPP inquiry group[1], and tape recordings of discussion at these meetings. My selection of quotes and summarised material aims to convey the depth and range of my inquiry processes.

Changing meaning, multiple levels

Looking back at my early writing on the CARPP programme I was struck by its urgency and vitality and surprised at how consistent the theme of finding or making a place of belonging was throughout my inquiry, despite my having had no conscious intention to make it a focus. It is as if the theme asserted itself through consistent use of inquiry practice and was expressed in different ways as my inquiry unfolded.

I developed this inquiry track reluctantly, gradually coming to accept that this was not a diversion from the inquiry I had planned to conduct, but part of my inquiry process. My inquiry activities - reflective practices, journal writing, short pieces shared with my inquiry group, inviting and working from verbal and written feedback - served as a way of focussing my attention and sharpening my awareness of a process of change that I was enacting. They contributed, added depth and awareness, and in this sense sustained a process that was already rolling.

Through this process of challenge and in writing my autobiography, I came to recognise links between the inquiry project I had initially planned to conduct with women in organisations and the inner process in which I was engaged. In revisiting this autobiographical material now I am making these links at a deeper level.

The theme of finding or making a place was expressed in a variety of ways throughout my inquiry. My initial approach began from a position that felt marginal on a number of counts: feminist politics, lesbian identity, and equalities consultant. From this starting position I considered how to represent and be my self in professional and personal spheres. This preoccupation with positioning and identity is reflected in my case studies.

[1] The function of this group is explained further in 'Methodology', Chapter 6

I adopted the 'mainstream/ margins' terminology initially as a way of expressing a sense of being marginalised and wishing for mainstream acceptance and status. This sense of being an outsider who could not have insider status without giving up an aspect of identity was reflected in my sense of being in personal and professional spheres.

In the course of my inquiry I developed an approach which broke down this opposition, opening up a more dynamic approach to my positioning in key relationships.

From where I am now I can identify four areas of inquiry through within which I enacted this re-positioning:

My place within the CARPP community

Shortly after I joined CARPP I plunged into conflict concerning the political ground of my participation. I experienced myself as 'on the margins' of a community in which I had expected to be 'in the mainstream'. The issues were painful and concerned the interface between my feminist politics, and my sense of self as a member of the community. This experience drew me into my first cycle of inquiry and shifted my expectations from seeking to *find* a community that reflected my politics and practice, into an exploration of how to *make* one. This first cycle of inquiry became the subject of the paper I submitted for my diploma (Page 1998). Through it, I developed a methodology that enabled me to work from passion, and enabling me to discover the ontological roots of my chosen inquiry subject (Reason and Marshall 2000).

In later stages of my inquiry I develop this theme of 'belonging/not belonging', and conceptualise further this shift from 'seeking' to 'making' connection (chapter 7).

My positioning as a consultant

I brought questions to my inquiry around how to market myself as a feminist consultant in an environment in which gender equality work was no longer a political or business priority. I thought about this as a choice between being positioned 'on the margins' of

equalities or 'in the mainstream' of organisation or management consultancy. This reflected the low status of women's equality work in organisations, and the widely shared experience of equal opportunities consultants.

My inquiry sustained me as I embarked on exploratory activities to extend my client base through new business and political collaborations. I describe these inquiry activities in chapter 4.

In my case studies I show how I developed strategies for asserting that the inquiry-based methods which I had developed were transferable to organisation development and change consultancy. While did not position me in the 'mainstream' it did provide me with a strong base from which to 'take up my place' (chapters 10 and 11).

My positioning within my family

In my overall inquiry the terms 'mainstream' and 'margins' took on an ontological significance. They referred to a sense of being an 'outsider' or an 'insider' within dominant social as well as organisational cultures.

In autobiographical writing I made the link between this ontological sense of not belonging and family scripts. Through my inquiry I enacted and tracked a process of re-writing this script for myself in relation to family and intimate friendships.

As my inquiry developed my understanding of the issues became more complex. In relation to family, friends and professional relationships a strengthening desire to 'take my place' within the mainstream accompanied an equally strong sense of drawing my sense of identity from the margins.

In later stages of my inquiry the need to choose between 'margin / mainstream' as a location for my feminist consultancy receded, and I developed a stronger sense of moving across borders. In chapter 12 I identified and conceptualised a set of associated skills and methodologies.

Inquiry process

In this section I give a flavour of the quality and level of inquiry work which contributed towards this ontological shift, and which is not directly reported elsewhere in my thesis.

> *There is a pattern in my CARPP writing of a feeling self coming into being, taking voice whether I like it or not: uncomfortable emotionality bursting forth; rage at feeling excluded; a sudden falling in love making me feel exhilarated, special and alive; and now this agony of separation. Through all of this I am learning and practising new skills, allowing emotions into consciousness, processing and theorising them, and trying out different constructs in order to do so. I am managing self and feelings in relation to others in the process, engaging in dialogue with my feeling self and, with encouragement from my CARPP inquiry group, observing myself in action.*
>
> *Through this process I feel as if old patterns are potentially breaking and I am opening to the possibility of acting and feeling from new paradigms.*
> Journal, June 1998

I re-read my early inquiry material to gain an overview of its scope and territory. Strength of purpose and consistency emerged of which I had not previously been so keenly aware. I saw that I had been breaking patterns and writing new narratives in ways that challenged previously held positions on the margins. This process had taken place in professional and personal spheres, and was associated with life changes that were painful and exhilarating. My return to this material offered a space to reflect on this process in retrospect. In the remainder of this section, I offer my reflections on this process.

As my inquiry developed, a new feeling self seemed to burst into being. Choices had begun to open up around how I chose to represent myself within professional and family interactions.

In relation to my family I began to recognise and to explore continuities between positions my father and I had taken up as outsiders. My inquiry tracked a growing sense that placing myself outside my family as a lesbian and as a feminist was no longer fruitful for

me. Taking up a position of challenge from the outside was beginning to feel like self-exclusion, and based on assumptions that I would be rejected in my chosen identities.

In the following journal extract I illustrate how through free association I made a connection between an experience of feeling excluded at a CARPP event, and previous initiatives I had taken to break this pattern within my family:

> On return home from CARPP
> *I was thinking about this process of breaking a pattern - coming out of the position of being on the margins, excluded, not wanted. Remembering the golden wedding anniversary of my godmother- wanting to go and being conscious that this was about me taking up a position in my family. At the event feeling: 'Yes, I have a right to be here, I have something to offer; I can be present as a lesbian and as a feminist without either conforming to or needing to challenge heterosexual culture'. Thinking: 'I will take up my role as a aunt, a family member', and that I was doing this on behalf of my whole family, in particular my father who when he had emigrated with us left the country feeling unwanted and persecuted.*
> *Discussing this pattern of family exclusion afterwards with my mother. When she made it clear that she did not share my perception asking myself: how much of this feeling of being unaccepted and unacceptable is my father's burden that I have been carrying? Can I put it down?*
> Journal, January 1998

After this event I tracked how I began to test scope for more 'insider' status within my family. For example I acted 'as if' I were included, participating in family events, and entering into a dialogue with my brother about our different narratives about our childhood. I experienced a growing sense of possibility of 'taking up my place' as a family member without giving up my values or hiding my sexual identity, for example as an aunt in relation to my nieces and in relation to my brother and sister in law. My inquiry practices were iterative enactment of participation and reflection, testing scope for 'belonging' without loss of identity through action and dialogue, recording my activities and experience. I shared some of this writing within my CARPP inquiry group, illustrated in the extracts below:

> *During a visit to my mother I opened a dialogue with my brother which took us into new territories. We began to explore differences and similarities in our experiences of our childhood; the ways in which we had each made sense of conflict between*

our parents and used the experience in our professional lives; how this related to our values, life and career choices in the present. Afterwards I wrote:

The power of feeling listened to, accepted, valued in what I have to contribute by him, a male figure - and the total novelty of the experience - has put me in touch with such longing for dialogue, to be valued and accepted for who I am by family
Writing presented to CARPP inquiry group, November 1997

My Inquiry group members and supervisor contributed to this process in a number of ways. Their critical feedback on my writing and my subsequent dialogue with them in the group contributed to my growing acceptance of this process as a valid part of my inquiry, challenging my sense that it was a diversion. At the same time having a receptive audience to 'write for' enabled the inner process to take place. I sharpened my inquiry skills and paid more attention to dialogue as my exploration developed. The following review was written for my inquiry group and illustrates the quality of interaction that developed within this dialogue with my brother:

My inquiry activities [since the last visit] have concentrated on:
Revisiting my family life with my brother: checking our different experience by sharing elements of mine, asking him to share elements of his. Exercising care to respect his perceptions and responding with mine. Arriving, as he said, at a different understanding between us in this process of exchange. Listening to his views of leadership and management. Remarking and inviting him to reflect on difference and sameness between us. Exploring our different paths with him and asking him to tell me how he perceived mine; remarking that I would use the same phrase as him to describe the work we had each chosen to do: creating environments for others to thrive in.
CARRP writing, January 2000

On another level the process of inquiry which took place within the group modelled and enacted the shift which was taking place through my inquiry. The experience of doing inquiry in a group where different sense making frames were used to make sense of experience seemed to provide a paradigm for belonging which was not based on shared identity or politics, and provided an alternative to the mainstream/margin opposition. Other members of the group at our last meeting, March 2001, acknowledged the importance of this experience.

Paradigm shift

Through these processes I enacted a sense of self that was new on a number of levels. I felt more able to hold onto a sense of myself as different, in environments in which my beliefs and identity might be accepted, but not be reflected back or necessarily affirmed through agreement. This shift opened up new positions from which to speak, and possibilities for entering into dialogue and relationships on a different basis. I felt able to address differences within relationships more directly, and relied less on a sense of shared experience and political frames. I engaged more directly with research writings from different conceptual frames and began to draw them together as I conceptualised my consultancy practice.

In my inquiry writing I explored my experience and enactment of these shifts in friendships, family relationships, professional relationships, and in my inquiry group. I took part in several group relations events as participant and staff member. I traced parallels between shifts in my own process and interventions I was able to make in consultancy with women, and then asked myself 'how' these shifts had taken place. In my consultancy I began to experiment by speaking out more strongly in 'mainstream' events 'as if I belonged', observing responses and offering feed back on my experience. I recorded these experiences and began to make choices about professional associations, based on openness to dialogue.

I noticed increasingly that my feeling of inclusion or exclusion could shift within interactions. My inquiry focus shifted to the dynamics of inclusion / exclusion and I began to record examples of triggers that seemed to shift me from feeling included to feeling excluded. Within a group relations event on social exclusion[2] I practised feeding back my experience of such a shift and found that through doing so I had opened up dialogue between participants and developed my own understanding of the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. I explore and develop this discussion in Chapter 7.

---

[2] OPUS (1998) Report of a working conference on 'social exclusion', 28th & 29th November 1998, OPUS occasional paper, http://www.opus.org.uk/

During this process I engaged critically with psychodynamic and feminist research to develop a conceptual frame which reflected the dynamic quality of my inquiry, as it moved between mainstream and marginal consultancy territories (see chapter 2).

Conclusions

This brief overview is intended to illustrate the process of 'taking my place in the mainstream' through engagement with life issues within my wider inquiry. Throughout my overall inquiry the boundaries between life issues, consultancy and inquiry were permeable. My process of taking up new ontological positions and finding new ways to enact my feminist politics was not confined to any one sphere and has been enabled by my inquiry practices.

I offer this chapter as ontological grounding for the inquiry that unfolds in subsequent chapters. In writing it I have got more in touch with how deeply identified I am with 'insider/outsider' themes and with the contribution of autobiographical writing to my overall inquiry.

Chapter 4

My Inquiry Journey 2
What Kind of Consultant am I?

My inquiry issues

This inquiry track began with a practical dilemma: How could I continue to make a living as a feminist freelance consultant? How could I financially sustain my PhD?

Practical urgency lent a quality of immediacy to this inquiry strand. When I joined CARPP I was preoccupied with doubts about how I could sustain myself financially. To market myself effectively I needed to articulate what my consultancy methods were and what value they would add for potential clients. I also needed to position myself strategically in relation to feminist and more mainstream consultants within my professional field.

Yet I could not find the right language to describe my consultancy. When asked what my consultancy was, by consultants or clients who were not equalities specialists, I felt tongue-tied. If I used the language of management or organisation consultancy, I felt a fraud. If I described my consultancy as 'women's equality' I was instantly marginalised. Neither of these options in any case seemed to describe the highly interactive and live quality of my experience of my self in action, at moments when my work was going well.

I recognised this dilemma in a woman researcher's account of 'feeling like a fraud'. In her research on women's sense of professional identity, she described how undermined she and other women who contributed to her research felt by the mismatch between their sense of professional competence and identity, and how this identity and associated skills were represented in their professional fields (McIntosh 1985, 1989).

As I began to explore these issues in my journal writing, I found that the questions that arose were multi-levelled:

> How far am I prepared to compromise in the professional identity I construct and present in mainstream environments, that do not reflect or value my own identity or beliefs? How far am I prepared to compromise in the kind of work I do, and in my choice of clients and associates? How can I represent consultancy carried out for feminist projects in ways that show how my approach will add value in mainstream environments? What is the appropriate balance between by business priorities, and my political values? How can I preserve my personal and political integrity in environments that do not address gender equality as an issue?

This inquiry like my 'life process' track took on a life of its own and ran throughout my inquiry. I continued to develop its themes within the consultancy based inquiry track that becomes the main focus of my later inquiry and is the basis of my case studies (chapters 9, 10 and 11).

Feminist versus business focus

During the first three years of my inquiry I explored new collaborations with private and voluntary sector business partners. Within these I tracked a series of practical and political dilemmas related to how to develop consultancy practice that combined political integrity with business viability.

I helped to initiate 'Beijing Action Partnership,' a consortium of six feminist consultants who worked primarily in voluntary and statutory sectors, four of whom had taken part in the Fourth World Conference on Women. We aimed to promote the Global Platform for Action, adopted at that conference, as an instrument for implementing women's equality. With members of this consortium I marketed our services, pitched for business, and carried out two consultancy assignments.

I took part in a series of networking events organised by a women managers' development network, made up primarily of consultants working in the private sector. This

led to an association with a consultancy firm, and collaboration with a male organisation development consultant. With him I marketed my services, followed up on business contacts, and jointly pitched for and carried out a consultancy assignment.

I tracked the process of collaboration in each case, noting how the business or feminist value frames used were shaping my approach to collaboration and to business development. I identified what dilemmas this posed for me, considered how to improve our practice, making practical suggestions and inviting colleagues to discuss them. I considered the quality of discussions within each partnership and drew conclusions concerning the basis on which collaboration was fruitful for me, or not.

I kept a journal to track reflections on my responses, interventions and results as I developed these consultancy collaborations. I also networked with feminist consultants in the voluntary and public sectors and with women managers in the corporate sector. Through these activities I explored how to be a feminist consultant in a variety of different business and political environments.

In my reflections and in discussions with colleagues I contrasted feminist and business orientated approaches to consultancy. I observed myself in action and compared the approaches I adopted with feminist and with business orientated colleagues. I invited cross-fertilisation in my approach, exploring scope for transferability of consultancy practices associated with different value frames within these different environments.

In my business collaboration I learned new approaches to marketing and introduced some of them into the feminist consultancy. This generated discussions about the balance between advocacy and marketing in our approach to potential clients. We discussed whether our meetings with our potential client were about influencing policy agendas, or about pitching for business; in either case, how much 'free' advisory time we were prepared to offer, and how we would charge for our services. I became more aware of the tension between political advocacy and selling in feminist approaches to generating women's equality consultancy business, and of the absence of this tension in business led marketing for non-gender specific work.

I explored how to preserve my political integrity and address business considerations. In the business led collaboration I observed how gender dynamics enhanced or undermined my authority in relation to male and female clients, and practised interventions to sustain an equal relationship to my male colleague and in relation to male and female clients. Through debriefing with my colleague on our experiences of these gendered dynamics I tested and build common ground with him.

As I moved between collaborations I gained a stronger sense of my core values and practices, and became better able to articulate them. I became more effective at working with colleagues who had different approaches.

In the following I illustrate some of my inquiry activities within this track and how I drew from literature on women in management to reflect on how gender influenced and informed my interactions.

> *November 15 1997*
> *I have been reading Helgeson's 'Female Advantage, Women's Ways of Leadership'.*
> *Her study is based on tracking four 'successful' women leaders and contrasting the way they interpret their roles and use authority to six male leaders tracked by Minzberg (1973) in 1968. She contrasts her approach to Hennig and Jardim's 'The Managerial Woman' and Harragan's 'Games Mother Never Taught You' which urge that 'business is no woman's land' and that that women need to learn the mindset and how to play the game in order to get on.*
>
> *Helgeson shows that women can succeed using their own authentic leadership style. She writes powerfully, and describes these women in a way in which I could willingly identify, in fantasy. One of the women she describes carries an affirmation on the dashboard above her cellular phone in her car that reads, 'I am powerful, beautiful, creative, and I can handle it!'- which echoes me perfectly in superwoman/megalomaniac frame of mind-usually after at least two cappuccino's! These women are used to being in control and having men and women and children at their bidding.*

She draws from Pearson's archetypes to describe these women as Magicians who have made it by their own efforts (Pearson 1986). Magicians know how to sacrifice and give care without losing identity, and break down dualities such as male/female, mastery, nurturance, logic intuition, and work from awareness of their inner connections.

Pearson recognizes the Warrior's talents for tapping into and drawing strength from energy sources outside herself (p. 126). She quotes Gilligan and Miller in associating the male warrior figure with the traditional male hero who charges into battle with the aim of dominating and winning, but also with a quest for autonomy, the main task of male development (Gilligan 1982; Miller 1976).

What is the message? Definitely 'be yourself and you will succeed'. 'The warrior is a dinosaur who will have outlived his time'.

Helgeson quotes Belenky et al to illustrate how her subjects use the metaphor of voice to depict intellectual and ethical development; the development of a sense of voice, mind and self were intricately intertwined (Belenky 1989). The notion of being true to oneself is the very essence of finding one's voice.

This reminds me of women managers' presentations at Bodo [an annual conference I attended for members of the European Network of Women Managers]:

It's not hard work that wears you out, but the repression of your true personality
Participant at women managers' 's business-networking event, June 1997

A similar theme -or perhaps a subtext - has been running in my head in thinking about my reactions to my new male business colleague. He presents a similar business orientated, 'positive thinking' to my mind denial of all vulnerability approach. Yet I am finding it refreshing and energizing, and am becoming more proactive in my approach to generating business.

Will I be able to bring my ability to work with inner connections into this collaboration, as well as drawing energy from his 'warrior' like qualities? Will I through this get more in touch with my own warrior like qualities?

November 20 1997

Last week I wrote the following notes in my diary:

P's approach and goal is solely and single mindedly to generate 'business' and homing in on opportunity to do this. Mine is also political, social justice. My approach seems to be more developmental, collaborative. Is this association of practice with values necessary?

His business focus gives me confidence to be more up front about the business reality of the interaction when meeting with a potential client. I am seeking work and need to focus not on 'how we could work together' or on 'exchanging ideas' but on 'how I might be able to help you as a consultant'.

In one of our debriefings after a first meeting with a woman client, I discovered he had not picked up the detail of her reactions. There were points at which I had noticed hesitation, and that she was testing us on our equal opportunities values, a territory in which I felt comfortable but with which he was unfamiliar. In offering him this feedback I was affirmed in the specific qualities and knowledge base I was bringing to our collaboration and reminded of my expertise as a basis for equal partnership.

In interviews I conducted in further cycles of inquiry, I explored sectoral differences and similarities in women 's experience of being valued, or not, by women colleagues in their organisations. The spectrum of political and business led associations through which I aimed to develop my consultancy is reflected in my selection of contributors to this cycle of interviews (chapter 7).

By the end of the inquiry I had established, to myself, that my consultancy skills and experience were transferable across sectors. I could hold my own and learn business skills from a male business partner, who was not a gender equalities specialist, and did not hold feminist values. Through this partnership, I found that I could generate more 'mainstream' organisation development consultancy, and had learned more about the approach to gender issues in the corporate sector.

I noticed I had become more impatient with the difficulties in sustaining collaborative approaches within my feminist business associations. Yet as a feminist I was unwilling to give up the value base of my consultancy practice, or relinquish advocacy for it within consultancy relationships..

It seemed I was at a crossroads. Now that I had established that I could 'go mainstream' in my consultancy practice, a different set of questions opened up about whether I was ready to do so. Was I willing to let go of my identity as gender equality 'specialist'? Was I confident that I could retain enough sense of my own integrity in the 'mainstream' of organisation consultancy? What implications would either choice have for future collaborations and business partnerships?

These questions cannot be easily answered, and are ongoing within my consultancy and inquiry. However in exploring their ontological grounding I was able to approach them from a position of greater awareness and choice.

What kind of consultant am I?

In this section I describe how I engaged with some of the ontological issues raised in this inquiry, and track how I brought a different self into my consultancy role.

Through journal writing I tracked my feelings of competence or incompetence within interactions with consultancy clients and colleagues and sought feedback on their experience and conceptualisation of learning within the interaction. Using reflection and free association I identified patterns of relating in relation to family history and other significant relationships.

I recorded snapshots of my self in action as consultant and inquirer, focusing on how I enacted gender and sexuality within my professional identity at different stages of my inquiry. I reflected on interactions with individual clients, colleagues at consultancy events; in one to one or group settings. I focused on the emotions generated in and following these interactions and drew from dreams as well as memories through free association to

link them to experiences that generated a similar quality of emotion. I identified patterns and used them as a basis for discussion in professional networks and discussions with my inquiry group at Bath. In these discussions I tested for recognition of patterns I had identified, for validity of my conclusions, and usefulness of my inquiry questions in the context of my overall inquiry.

In the following I illustrate my inquiry process with two contrasting extracts from my journal writing. In each one I am exploring the theme of my sense of professional competence as a consultant. In both I show how my sense of professional identity and personal history were intertwined, and how I worked with these connections to build my professional competence in relationship to others.

In the first I describe a moment when I lost touch with my sense of professional competence:

> *I am standing outside K's door - a tall elegant Georgian house. Feeling nervous - and catch a visual image of myself as a governess standing at the porch of at a stately home. I ring the bell and K. lets me in. I am struck by how sophisticated and attractive she looks. We go upstairs and into a drawing room. The house seems to be filled with light and beautiful objects, paintings, Chinese vases and books. I feel overwhelmed and think: this is how I would like my life to be, everything perfect. Then immediately feel full of the sense of not being like that. In the same moment of breathing in the light and elegance and wanting, wanting this to be me, I am confronted with the knowledge that it is not. I am filled with sense of lack, of desiring, and in desiring, have lost touch with what I already have.*
>
> *She serves green tea; I notice and admire he teapot. Long afterwards I continue to drink this tea myself, as if by drinking it I could absorb and prolong for a little while longer the sense of being there.*
>
> .
>
> *I take a hold of myself - I am here to provide consultancy, not adulation. I have professional expertise; K has invited me here because she knows and values me in this role, and she is paying me to share it. I had better pull myself together, and get into role!*

But somehow I have reversed the roles, I have given away a part of myself, the part that feels professionally competent. I need to take it back, but it's a struggle; my sense of having something of value to offer has been washed away and I can't help feeling a fraud. Besides, I am overwhelmed by desire to be like her. To be her and what she represents in my internal world. To be 'not me'.

I ask her to talk about the issues she would like to discuss, and we begin the consultancy session. I reclaim my competent professional self, but the other is close beside me, listening. My sense of identification with her becomes a source of playful vitality, which I continue to associate with the consultancy.
Journal writing, July 1997

This account seemed to capture key issues that I struggled with in this inquiry track; an elusive sense of security in my professional identity and a difficulty in keeping hold of it that I noticed particularly in relation to women clients. If I could not retain a sense of my own value to myself, how could I represent myself as valuable to others? The association between feeling 'competent' and 'feeling myself,' the permeable boundaries between social and professional identities, and the dynamic of cross identification between women are themes that I develop in my cycle of interviews (chapter 6).

I described this interaction to a Swedish women participant at a feminist research seminar in Finland. She found it instantly recognisable, even though we were talking across cultures, and sectors. Together we described this pattern as a chain of cross identifications between women, who recognise in each other a representation of what each imagines 'success' to be, and desires to have because of the success that it represents. In these interactions women perceive each other as successful, as having something they desire and lack, make an unfavourable self-comparison, and experience feelings of inadequacy and incompetence. However we agreed that identification between women can in other circumstances be a powerful force for change. As I write I can taste the tea which K served and a sense of vitality returning.

Through tracking my consultancy activities I continued to explore what enabled me to bring my self into my work in the fullest sense. What was it and when was it that I felt 'competent', and fully myself? What triggered a sense of 'incompetence', of self slipping

away, of not having anything to offer, and how could I conceptualise this process? What was the nature of my competence and how could I describe it in my marketing material?

In my writing I re-discovered the importance of travel and being in movement; of positive and pleasurable associations with landscape and place, of being invited as evidence of feeling valued. As I travelled to Italy, and to Finland for new assignments, it was as if I had joined up different parts of my life, linking consultancy work with associations of previous fun and adventure. I sensed a new vitality and more playful approach to consultancy. This new consultancy self appears in my second case study (chapter 10).

The following journal extract is one of many examples of 'travel writing' within this strand of my inquiry. It illustrates the sense of adventure linked to place; of positive connection through association with positive memories; and of the sense of being valued generated by invitation to peak at an event.

> On being keynote speaker at a seminar in Oulu, Finland
> Feb. 5 2000
> *I looking out of the plane window and see frozen lakes and pine forest - wild - reminders of childhood in Canada, and feel my heart leap. Stepping out of the plane into snow, snowflakes blowing into my face – I feel the keenness of the cold, and laughing out loud with delight.*
>
> *Why is my adrenalin so high, my sense of excitement so intense? I do not feel tired! Somehow these encounters give me a keenness of meaning and purpose that I do not find elsewhere. A sense of 'me-ness', of having something positive to give, of having ideas, of being exciting, worth knowing, able to give others sense of the importance of what they are doing. How I love the challenge of exchange, of mutual inspiration, affirmation in a gathering of women committed to working for equality in a range of different contexts!*
>
> *The intensity of the encounters, the seriousness, even passion of the presentations, connects me to my own passion for using my skills to contribute to social justice, enables me to speak from my deepest held views and values without having to hold back, feeling a power to inspire and bring people into interaction with each other - doing it!*

Walking together at night to the restaurant - a local fishing boat moored in the ice-covered sea, enjoying the sense of adventure and camaraderie among travellers. A sudden sense of potential for bringing different parts of myself in to new consultancy identities: of being an adventurer consultant, a philosopher thinker consultant, an inspirational consultant, a maker and affirmer-of-connections consultant.

Love, meaning, adrenalin, energy, focus, affirmation, purpose, competence, pleasure, sensuality, humour and laughter, satisfaction, belonging...
Journal February 2000

In this inquiry track I explored the dynamic and fluid quality of my sense of myself and of professional competence, and of how this was enacted in relationship to others. I became more attuned to what triggered low or high energy and begin to develop a more playful sense of my self in different roles. Inspired by a presentation on use of irony as a strategy for women's leadership in organisations (Wahl 1997) I began to seek out feminist psychoanalytic writing on identity, power and sexuality as a way of conceptualising my experience of inter-subjective dynamics between women (Benjamin 1990; 1995; Orbach and Eichenbaum 1994). I illustrate my engagement with this literature in chapter 8, and show how I used it to develop my conceptual frame in chapter 12.

I tapped into this energy to sustain a different sense of my consultancy self within collaborations and marketing.

Marketing feminist consultancy

Alongside exploration of feminist and 'mainstream' consultancy collaborations, I drafted publicity and marketing material as a way of articulating more clearly how I work. I experimented with different ways of framing my consultancy as feminist or gender-neutral, and powered by experience of successful consultancy interventions, wrote these up as a series of strap lines. I drew up draft fliers and worked with feedback from my supervisor and CARPP inquiry group to make clearer statements about my role and value added in my consultancy I describe.

Throughout my inquiry I continued to draft publicity material alongside my reflections on how to position my business and professional identity. I describe this process in the journal extract below:

> August 10 1998
> *I've noticed myself drafting and redrafting my self-description as I travel back and forth from affirming work experiences – currently sessions with women ' s project activists: so that's what I am!* or *that's what I am not!*
>
> *Here are some samples:*
>
> Margaret Page, MAYA Consultancy
> Dialogue in organisations, networks and partnerships
>
> Margaret Page, MAYA Consultancy
> Equality - diversity - innovation - change
> Consultancy to organisations networks and partnerships
>
> Margaret Page, MAYA Consultancy
> Ideas into action
> Consultancy to organisations networks and partnerships
>
> MAYA Consultancy
> Spaces for thinking and acting together
> Consultancy for women and men in organisations, networks and communities
>
> MAYA Consultancy
> Organisations networks and partnerships
>
> MAYA Consultancy
> Consultancy and research for sustaining women in organisations
> Networks, partnerships, innovation, change
>
> MAYA Consultancy,
> Promoting gender equality in diversity

The process of this inquiry was playful and painful, uncomfortable and exhilarating. Its varied stands cross-fertilised and added depth to my consultancy practices and to my strategies for self-presentation in professional spheres. I illustrate these outcomes and my process as it unfolded in my case studies (chapters 9 -11), and integrate them into the conceptual frame I elaborate for feminist consultancy in chapter 12.

Chapter 5

An Inquiry Overview

Introduction

Previous chapters in this section illustrated how my inquiry developed through practices that were grounded in my life process and professional practice. This process was dynamic and emergent; through it I developed life and professional skills, and took up new and more proactive positions in relation to professional and persona dilemmas. This process was sometimes planned, and sometimes evolved in relation to external events.

This chapter closes this introductory section of my thesis. It is intended to assist my readers by providing a route map of my inquiry. In it I provide a brief description of the four pathways which my inquiry took, an overview of the data streams that they generated, and of how they interlinked.

These pathways ran in parallel, the focus of activity moving between them according to events and context. For the purposes of my overview I present them roughly in the order in which they were initiated. I show how they were inter-linked, and reference them to the chapters of my thesis that are based on their findings.

Conceptual and methodological pathways ran throughout the inquiry. I have put them at the end of my overview to reflect the focus on conceptual work in the closing stages of my inquiry.

My inquiry findings and activities associated with each inquiry track are fully described in the chapters to which they relate.

An overview of my inquiry pathways

Pathway 1: Inquiry as life process

Data stream 1: 'Mainstream or 'Margins'

In my first year on the CARPP PhD programme I explored my own experiences of marginality, in professional and social identities. I mapped themes and patterns of interaction in consultancy relationships and with family and friends, identified crosscutting themes, and developed strategies for changing these patterns. Drawing from this material I drew up questions to explore more directly in discussions with women in organisations (chapter 6).

This inquiry track was self-generating. It ran alongside my consultancy activities, informing and cross-fertilising my sense making as I introduced inquiry into my consultancy practice. It enabled me to discover the ontological ground of my inquiry, and to enact more dialogic, less marginal positions in my consultancy and personal life (chapters 3 and 4).

Pathway 1, inquiry as life process

Data stream 2: Sustaining self in professional practice

During the first two years of my inquiry, I developed strategies to sustain myself emotionally and financially as a self-employed and self-financing feminist inquirer.

I tracked collaborations I initiated with feminist and business led consultants, and explored the interface between business, professional and political approaches (chapter 4).

The issues that emerged informed cycles of inquiry within my consultancy practice, and are further explored in my case studies (chapters 9,10,11).

Pathway 2: Inquiry with Women in Organisations

Data stream 1: Mapping the Territory of my Inquiry

I initiated this cycle of inquiry when I was ready to test how widely shared my experience was of working with women in organisations. I carried out a cycle of six interview-based discussions, using a topic guide of questions drawn from patterns identified in pathway 1 (chapter 6).

Through analysing the process of conducting these interviews in relation to content of the discussions, I developed methods for conceptualising dialogue within my interactions. In response to challenge from one of my interviewees I modified my conceptual frame to take more account of the need to specify the political and organisational contexts in which my inquiry was situated.

There was overlap in time between this cycle of activity and the consultancy described in my case studies (chapters 9, 10, and 11). This allowed for cross fertilisation in conceptualising my inquiry findings and methodology. In my analysis I signpost themes, dilemmas and challenges to feminist collaboration that I explore more fully in my case studies.

Pathway 1: Inquiry as Life Process

Data stream 3: Reframing the notion of 'secure base"

As I was preparing to analyse the findings from the interviews described above, the ending of a life partnership 'interrupted' my inquiry. I became too preoccupied with the distress associated with this change to engage with the interview data.

I decided to take this opportunity to explore the politics and practices associated with 'belonging', and to conceptualise my need for to create a secure base. I developed strategies and practices to sustain myself, and a feminist critique of concepts drawn from attachment research that had informed my sense making.

Through these cycles of inquiry I made a conceptual and ontological shift from 'seeking' to 'making' belonging. I developed these strategies and conceptual tools further in my case studies.

Pathway 2: Inquiry with women in organisations:

Data stream 2: Collaboration Breakdown

In these cycles I used inquiry to make sense of a breakdown in collaboration with a client for whom I carried out a research contract. In the thesis I offer it as the first of three case studies illustrating how I used inquiry to sustain feminist consultancy (chapter 9).

I explored and conceptualised ethical and political dilemmas I encountered within the consultancy.

Pathway 2: Inquiry with women in organisations:

Data stream 3: Inquiry as consultancy practice

In these cycles I introduced inquiry explicitly into my consultancy practice within two transnational consultancy projects concerned with gender equality. I illustrate this in two further case studies (chapters 10 and 11).

I show that these case studies are multi layered. Through successive cycles of inquiry each conceptualises the consultancy methods I developed, the interactions between women with whom I am working, and the results of my consultancy and inquiry activities.

In each case study I illustrate my use of inquiry as a tool to transform power relationships between women, challenging 'subject / object ' interactions and seeking to sustain the spirit of participation through ' subject / subject ' mutual exploration (Benjamin 1995; Clinchy 1996). In my analysis I draw from the findings and methodology I developed in my analysis of interviews (chapter 6), and make links with my first case study.

Through these cycles of inquiry I felt affirmed in my purpose of supporting feminist collaboration through inquiry, and in developing and conceptualising practices necessary to sustain myself.

Pathway 3

Conceptualising feminist consultancy practice

Writing each of my case studies involved cycles of inquiry in order to conceptualise further the activities I had described. I identified cross cutting theses and developed a conceptual model for sustaining feminist consultancy and collaboration (chapter 12).

In earlier cycles of this track I entered into a critical dialogue with selected texts and developed conceptual tools for my analysis and practice (chapter 8). In my case studies I show how this conceptual work informed my consultancy practice (chapters 9 -11).

In the closing stages of writing my thesis, I returned to the politics of my inquiry. In a series of 'Red Threads' which interleaf my analysis of inquiry findings I introduce and comment on the tensions between business led and feminist approaches in the research literature I have drawn upon and in my professional field, and on how these were reflected in my analysis.

Pathway 4

Conceptualising methodology for my feminist inquiry

In this inquiry track I read and critiqued feminist and action research methodology literature. I discussed my methodology with my supervisor, members of my CARPP inquiry group, and with feminist researchers. In chapter 2 I describe this process and reflect on the political and epistemological principles of the framework that I developed.

Draft versions of this chapter were discussed and assessed as I progressed from diploma to MPhil and PhD on the CARPP programme. However as development of my methodology was integral to my inquiry process, the chapter was not completed until the closing stages of my thesis.

A final note to my readers:

This chapter has not presented findings or content, its purpose was to provide a map of the territory covered by my inquiry.

A contributor to one of my interviews distinguished between the need to support individual women practitioners, and the need to sustain and resource the work that we do (contributor D, chapter 6).

In this chapter I have tried to illustrate how my inquiry became a means to sustain and develop myself, as an individual, within my professional practice and life process, as well as a means to sustain the work I carried out within my feminist consultancy; and that both were necessary in order to sustain feminist collaboration.

In reading the following two sections of my inquiry I invite you to hold this overview in mind, and select the pathways you would take.

Section 2

Preparing the Ground for Inquiry with Others

The three chapters in this section mark transitions in my inquiry. Each is concerned with an aspect of conceptual reframing associated with a shift in my inquiry stance. Each constructs a new position from which to enact the next phase of inquiry.

In chapter 6 I map generative and degenerative patterns in workplace dynamics between women in a range of organisational settings and explore similarities with patterns that I enact in my interview discussions. In chapter 7 I show how I learn to enact generative forms of belonging and how this sustained me through my inquiry practices. In chapter 8 I draw from selected feminist texts to conceptualise how women construct and enact gender difference within relationships.

These chapters mark a shift in focus from the structures of inequality and discrimination, towards the dynamics of enacting power. In the previous section I showed how this shift was enacted on a number of levels, in response to ontological, professional and political challenge. Though it I constructed the basis for developing and conceptualising a different approach to my feminist consultancy practice.

In the third section of my thesis I show how I took this up within my consultancy interventions, and how this challenged the culture and equal opportunities practice of my client organisations.

Chapter 6

Mapping the Territory of Workplace Dynamics Between Women

Introduction

This chapter presents my analysis of interviews with six women in which I explored our experiences of the dynamics between women in organisations. Through engaging with the data and confronting issues concerning analysis and presentation I developed inquiry practices and a conceptual framework that I developed in subsequent inquiry cycles.

The chapter is divided into four further sections:

In **Methodology,** I introduce my contributors and inquiry questions, describe the interview process and the framework I developed for my analysis.

In **Findings 1** I provide an overview of the substantive issues that emerged from the interview discussions. These are referenced to summaries of individual interviews appended to the thesis.

In **Findings 2** I consider the relationship between the dynamics described in Findings 1 and my experience of the dynamics enacted in the interview session.

In **Conclusions** I return to my research questions and consider how my findings will inform further cycles of my inquiry.

Methodology

Conducting the interviews

This cycle of inquiry was the first in which I invited other women to inquire with me into the dynamics between women in organisations. My aim was to map issues to explore further in my consultancy or with these contributors, through joint discussion of questions I had drawn from my previous cycles of inquiry (chapters 3 and 4).

I aimed to include in my analysis my experience of the quality of interaction enacted in the interview situation as well as the verbal content of our discussion. This was consistent with my inquiry practices in earlier cycles of inquiry. In the Findings 1 and 2 below I describe how I recorded and worked with this data in my analysis. My inquiry questions and approach are appended (appendix 2).

I introduce my interviewees in the section below. In selecting them I considered how to take account of race, sexuality and other identity differences between women.

Feminist research demonstrates that women's experience does not generalise across identities and social position (Page and Lorandi 1991; Bell 2000; Bravette 1996; Cockburn 1995). Research documents how women have organised across divisions arising from ethnicity and nationality and different identities (Albrecht and Brewer 1990; Cockburn and Hunter 1999; Mulholland and Patel 1999; Patel 1999; Yuval Davies 1997). However there is little research on how women work across differences of power arising from organisational position. I resolved to base my selection on women consultants and managers who had expressed an interest in exploring their experience of the dynamics between women, and within our discussions to be to alert to how issues of identity interfaced with organisational position.

I approached women I had met through professional networks and consultancy and I had more offers to contribute than I could take up. In my selection I aimed for diversity of political stance and sector. Interviews were tape-recorded and took place in public cafes

or restaurants (2), at my home (2) or at contributors' homes (2). They took between one and two and a half hours.

I introduced my inquiry to contributors by referring to responses to my previous research findings (Page / Lorandi 1991). In numerous workshops and discussions women had shared their frustration and pain at difficult work relationships with women, and their need for opportunities to explore the difficulties and find ways of working through them. I situated my current inquiry as an opportunity to break the taboos in talking about these issues in order to support feminist work.

Previous experience of the highly charged nature of the territory demonstrated the importance of offering a non-judgmental space to enable the material I wanted to work with to emerge. I held in mind a rough map of the territory I wished to explore and used questions I had prepared as a topic guide. I sent these questions in advance to interviewees who requested them. I conducted the interviews as exploratory conversations, offering contributors an opportunity to jointly make sense of the experiences they brought to the inquiry.

I began each session with an open question, designed to get contributors to focus on current 'live' issues related to the inquiry. Some contributors responded with a situation or interaction with which they were preoccupied, others engaged with the topic in a more exploratory fashion.

I worked with examples brought by the contributors, invited each to narrate experiences that came to mind as we talked and to engage in joint sense making of their experiences. At certain points I interjected examples of my own to illustrate an interpretation I was offering or to introduce a different way of making sense of a dynamic they were describing. My aim was to invite a dialogue based on an exchange of experience and of sense making frameworks.

To achieve an exchange that honored the distinctive qualities of each of our experiences, I was alert to issues that were currently alive for me and that influenced my approach to the issues. I introduced aspects of my own experience where it seemed useful to illustrate

and test my own sense making. I made observations that made our sense making frames explicit and invited discussion about them.

The contributors

The contributors were six women in senior management or consultancy roles. All except one, who was a member of a women managers' network, had experience of promoting women's equality in their organisational or consultancy roles. Three had a history of feminist activism. They varied in age between mid-thirties and mid-fifties; all were white, five identified as British and one as multi-cultural. Their personal histories, class and educational backgrounds were very different, as were their ideological approaches to women's equality. I had established relationships based on shared professional interests with four of them and had met the other two through professional networks.

Contributors drew predominantly from professional experience in the UK public and voluntary sectors; two also drew from international consultancy, and one from the US corporate sector. All of them situated their experience in the context of their organisations and sectors within the current social and political environment; several of them spontaneously referred to childhood and family history to explain the lenses they brought to make sense of the experiences they described.

These lenses were diverse. Between them they illustrated a range of different ways of interpreting and acting on the interactions they described. While in no way claiming to be representative, their analysis offers a snapshot of a range of different ways in which women committed to equality currently (in 1999) experienced and interpreted their interactions with other women in their professional roles.

Methodological and ethical dilemmas

I conducted six interviews between October 1998 and January 1999. In April/May 1999 I made transcripts from the tapes; in January 2000 I returned to the transcripts and tapes to begin the process of analysis.

Writing the transcripts reminded me of the many levels of communication in which I had engaged with my contributors; how to make sense of the material was no longer obvious. I had moved from wanting to carry out a simple empirical analysis, to wanting something that could address the representational and inter-subjective content that had been communicated between contributors and myself.

I completed the transcripts and decided I did not yet have the methodological tools to do justice to the richness and complexity of the data I had collected. I was not ready to develop this strand of my inquiry. In my case studies I show how I continued to work with the issues that emerged within my consultancy based inquiry (chapters 9-11).

When I returned to the transcripts after a gap of 12 months, I re-encountered these methodological challenges. How to convey the quality of interaction unique to each, how to convey the dynamic quality of interaction between myself and contributor? I wondered whether I had been naïve in thinking that there could be any cross cutting themes in transcripts that were so diverse.

Several contributors had expressed unease at my focus on women to women dynamics; I had worked hard to assert the value of women as a subject of inquiry in their own right. Had my focus on women to women dynamics led me into an essentialist approach? I had reviewed the extensive literature on gender difference in relation to women managers and leaders and recognised that it was inconclusive (chapter 8). I resolved to situate my analysis of the findings in the specific organisational and political context within which my data was generated. Furthermore, I resolved to situate my analysis in the nature of my relationship to each contributor and the interaction between us during the interview.

While reading transcripts and listening to tapes I found myself making associations between generative and degenerative patterns in women's interactions which were explored in the interviews, and patterns I had mapped in my consultancy and personal life process inquiry tracks (chapters 3 and 4). I developed a method of analysis that allowed me to identify these similarities in pattern, and in later cycles of inquiry I drew from feminist and psychodynamic research to conceptualise them. Within this cycle I experienced a growing sense of confidence as I identified similar patterns across inquiry

tracks. In my discussion with contributors I discovered common ground in our experiences and differences in how we interpreted and made sense of them.

Feminist researchers have asserted that knowledge is embedded in women's day to day experience (Stanley and Wise 1981) and that women jointly sharing their hidden knowing can through a process of joint sense making come up with a dramatically different interpretation of events (Code 1991). In my case studies I develop this conceptualisation of how women generate new knowledge through joint discussion of their experiences in organisations (chapter 12).

In her account of absorbing and analysing material from her interviews with women managers, Marshall (1995), describes an initial stage of immersing herself in the material. At this stage I immersed myself in my material, focusing on explicit verbal content, and the implicit relational interactions conveyed through voice tone, timing and rhythm. I developed a set of headings, which I used as a template for a first stage analysis of each transcript (see below). I noticed that listening to tapes enabled me to recall aspects of our interactions that added to the meaning of the text, and included headings relating to the interaction at interview into my template. I used this template to write a summary of the overall findings, drawing from each individual interview analysis. In writing this overview, I struggled with a major doubt; how to write an overall summary which remained true to the integrity of each separate interaction? In this chapter I retained individual analyses to illustrate richness of material and inter relationship between implicit and verbal content.

My first stage analysis generated a chapter disproportionate in size to the rest of my thesis. I have selected from it to convey richness of the data and breadth of terrain covered and to provide evidence of quality of dialogue between contributors and myself. I illustrate how I developed a method of analysis that drew from both verbal and non-verbal interaction as sources of data.

Framing the analysis

The template I developed for the analysis was multi-dimensional. It consisted of:

- A summary of each contributor's account of the substantive issues they brought to my inquiry; the experiences they described and statements they made about their sense-making frames.
- My account of the dynamics between myself and my respondent
- An exploration of correlation or contrast between these two accounts
- A note of shifts in my conceptual frame which occurred through this process of analysis

I brought the following research questions to my analysis:

- Is there anything meaningful to be said about the dynamics between women in organisations, which transcends differences of organisational context and the sense making frames of the contributors? How/ can general statements be made without losing touch with situated identities and interactions?
- What is the relationship between the implicit and explicit content of the sessions; the dynamics described and the dynamics enacted as I experience them?
- What is the relationship between statements contributors make about the ways of working they advocate and sense making frameworks– and the stories they tell about the dynamics between women in organisations?
- How can this analysis in terms of methodology or content shape or inform my approach to my case studies of consultancy with women in organisations?

Re-approaching the transcripts after an interval of time gave me a sharpened sense of what had shaped my initial questions and how my stance had changed as a result of discussions with contributors. I made contextual factors explicit in my analysis: relationship with each contributor, and meaning given by political and social context.

Introduction to Findings 1 and 2

This introduction presents two full analyses of interviews. It aims to demonstrate the richness and complexity of the interview data, and my method of analysis.

I selected contributors with contrasting ideological approaches in order to illustrate dynamics which cut across contributors' explanations and sense making frames. The remaining analyses are provided in appendix 3. In the two sections that follow I develop an overview which engages with my research questions and draws from my analyses of individual interviews.

Analysis of individual interviews was an important sense making phase in my inquiry. In order to make this phase accessible for the reader I used a table format that juxtaposed contributors' narratives of lived experience with statements about their conceptual frameworks. While this format does not convey the dynamic nature of our interaction, it is succinct and conveys the breadth of ground covered in each interview.

As a way of adding texture, I juxtaposed each table with my own account of the quality of interaction between myself and each contributor, and explored correlation and contrasts between this account and the tables.

This presentation achieved a number of my objectives for this cycle of inquiry. It allowed me to explore the relationship between contributors' sense making conceptual frameworks as they described them and their narratives of lived experience. It also offered a way of charting my own 'inner map' of the issues that made up the substance of my inquiry in relation to the maps brought by my contributors

Contributor B (interview 3)

B is a freelance consultant who has just left the US corporate sector. In her interview she drew from her experience as an international consultant in this sector.

I have an established friendship with B based on shared professional interests and mutual support in developing our consultancy. We met at an international conference for women managers and developed a playful, cultural commentary of the interactions between participants. I was intrigued with our ability to form a bond across our differences of values, of politics in relation to gender, and sector. In the following table I summarise our discussion.

Contributor B		
STATEMENTS *about* lived experience; approach and aspirations		**DESCRIPTIONS *of* lived experience**
1	'I do not expect people to relate to me on the basis of my gender; that is how I am and I would find it difficult to be otherwise.'	B sets herself outside most gendered dynamics; resists gendered characterisation
2	Gender is mediated through culture difference and qualified by other differences e.g. generation, temperament, skill, experience, context	Older men (60+) in US sometimes have problems in seeing women as peers In some cultures men have problems relating to women as peers
3	Women are equally competent and able, are not necessarily disadvantaged by gender Competitive dynamics experienced between women are due to being less secure and experienced in being in positions of power, feeling you need to prove yourself, being younger Effective teamwork requires both focus on task and awareness of interpersonal issues and process	Women peers in a US corporation internal consultancy team were: • Overly concerned with interpersonal relationships • Competitive with each other – in the presence of clients • Less good (than men) at setting emotion aside in order to attend to the task in hand Women clients (in S American cultures) are open to friendship and form strong bonds
4	Paradigm of good working relationships: balance between task and focus on inter personal dynamics; not letting your emotions take hold; keeping home and work issues separate; being able to ask for and get direct feedback on performance; not needing to 'prove' yourself; fun and enjoyment – Ability to work in this way for women comes with age and experience – and is culturally specific	Women tend to be more emotional, they can't compartmentalise their life as well as men do...and not all men and not all women Men concentrate more on the task and women looking much more at the whole dynamic Women may have experience of compartmentalising Men bring more fun into work UK women and men are not so good at direct feedback; tend to 'get hurt' and personalise inappropriately
5	Gendered expectations are culturally specific and may work to women's advantage	B enjoys friendships with women clients in Latin America but is not able to have cross gender friendships except in some cultures
6	Boundaries need to be kept in all consultant/client relationships in the interests of protecting ability to work to task	Seniority and geographical distance keeps sufficient boundaries-with women and friendship can compromise ability to work to task sometimes

I wanted to introduce the quality of playful creativity, and its basis in cultural difference which was a feature of our relationship, into my research. I also wished to illustrate our mutual valuing across public and private sectors, in contrast to my experience in the network of which we were both members of being devalued by and devaluing of private sector identified women. However B was reluctant to be interviewed and doubtful about the value of her contribution, as, she said, she did not 'use a gender frame'.

During the interview I felt nervous and conscious of the limited time B had agreed to give. We met in a noisy restaurant of her choice. It was difficult to concentrate on food, eating, and to keep track of the ground we were covering in the interview.

The following (after the table) analysis of the session attempts to convey the pattern of our explicit verbal exchange, in relation to the implicit content:

B reacted defensively to my first rather clumsy attempt to introduce a gender lens into our discussion about cultural difference. She asserted that women were competent, equal and no different to men. By the end of the interview she was open to exploring gendered characteristics of women in work roles, but continued to frame them as specific to culture, and context:

> *Me: In the last 10 minutes I'd like to hear a little bit about your relationship with your woman boss and know if there's anything you would like to say about your female peers in the team in America – were there any differences that you associate at all with gender?*
>
> *B: No – individual cultural backgrounds was stronger that that- as I said before I would find the men concentrating more on the actual task and females looking much more preoccupied with the dynamics among people - you know you need both so it was fine...maybe women seemed to be - and I don't know that that could be true in a different context and in another team - more competitive than men*

For much of the interview I felt as if I was pushing against, being perceived as seeking to impose a view, rather engaging in playful exchange.

B was responding to me as if I was trying to get her to name gender-related problems that she did not experience. In response she asserted other kinds of differences such as those that were individual, temperament and skill-based, experiences in positions of having power or not, being gossipy or not, competitive or not, or of culture-based gender relations which allowed cross-gender friendship or did not. It seemed to me when I was analysing the transcript that she was defending against assertion of gender-based difference because in her view this would have been a problem, in conflict with the gender-neutral competency-based approach with which she identified. But perhaps this was also an enactment of a workplace dynamic in which women were expected to demonstrate they could perform equally to task, and in which reference to gender difference was taboo. I

recorded feelings of unease, of getting off the track, losing the track, feeling B was feeling constrained, and feeling constrained myself. I also noted a contrast between this feeling of constraint and the more mutually exploratory, playful interactions we were used to. In these we constructed a shared position outside the cultures to which we referred. In this interview I was talking to B as an 'insider', addressing her in her role inside the organisation to which she refers. In doing so we had lost our shared standpoint of multiple identities, moving in and out and across cultures

This sense of constraint was familiar; I had felt this way in organisations when at odds with colleagues or managers who do not want to use a gender lens. In these situations to assert the relevance of gender was often interpreted as unprofessional and oppositional. It risked interpretation of being women lacking competence to operate in an 'ungendered' world.

For much of the interview I felt at sea, uneasy, off track and focus. We were in new territory outside our established playful relational mode and outside previously established boundaries, with a hint of potential danger. I felt protective of my research and potential devaluing of it, and wary of shattering the careful boundaries within which our friendship had been nurtured.

I managed this by paying attention to attunement, making reference at certain points to meeting points between us and once, at a point where B had engaged with my subject, mirroring voice tone to try to convey connection through recognition of the distinctiveness of the experience she was conveying. This skill is associated with 'connected knowing', a form of knowing generated through mutual recognition, which is described in research into women's ways of knowing exchange (Belenky 1986; Clinchy 1996).

After the interview I felt anxious about having crossed some unspoken boundary about aspects of our lives we had not shared within our friendship together. While we have not continued to explore these themes explicitly since the interview we have increased the area of sharing within our friendship and continue to enjoy the playful quality of our first interactions.

Contributor C (interview no 2)

C is an international organisation consultant, who runs a development programme on

women's leadership; she drew from these experiences in her interview.

I had no history of friendship or common networks with C. I had met her at a meeting with her employer, a client organisation, and been struck by the contrast between her strong individual presence and the gender culture in her surroundings, between her approach to consultancy and the more traditional approach of her male boss. I was surprised and intrigued when she expressed interest in contributing to my inquiry.

This was only the second of my interviews; I was still new to the role and to the process, and unsure how much of my own experience and sense making frame to bring into the discussion. In the following table I summarise our discussion.

Contributor C		
STATEMENTS *about* lived experience; approach and aspirations		**DESCRIPTIONS *of* lived experience**
1	*As senior manager in her organisation:* 'I am perceived as a strong woman, supportive by women lower down, a threat by a minority at peer level.' 'My approach to senior male decision makers is to find out what interests them most, then seek their language and bring them round to my way of thinking; some colleagues see this as a threat.'	*Relationships with women colleagues*: In the context of reorganisation in her organisation: performance related pay and downsizing- flatter management structures: • Some women at senior level are flirtatious, workaholic, barking at men- 'Attila the Hen'. • Women like to believe its worse for them; and expect other women to collude with this view, cosy up together in opposition. • C lost some of her women's friendships when moved out of victim role and became successful, 'breaking ranks'.
2	*As lead trainer on women's leadership development courses*: C models the approach she advocates women should adopt: 'What we try and promote (on the women's leadership course) is the choices they have in their different organisational cultures; one choice is to leave, let go of old agendas.. this can be painful' and relates it to her own developmental path: 'When I discovered the fundamental idea of free will, even if only the free will to react to what's going on, I found that very painful because I couldn't be a victim any more and blame anyone else any more.'	Women in C's generation often do not want to change- they are stuck- because they anticipate rejection: Women don't differentiate between 'they don't like my actions and 'they won't like me'; men have less problem seeing the difference

	As an external consultant: 'Boundaries between friendship and work are more are more fluid for women I think; this has generative and degenerative consequences'	'One thing that strikes me is the way new professional relationships will start up between women: there tends to be a certain amount of building empathy, getting to know each other- ...and because that tends to be a preferred way for most women we can get into a bit of difficulty ... resorting to overly formal ways of pulling back in to the boundaries'
	'Its easier to trust most women and this makes a more collaborative approach possible'	'I am probably more iikely to use empathy with a woman, find shared values, and invite collaboration, whereas with a man it's more like challenge: why do you want to do that?'
	Women move between different worlds - hold paradox a lot better than men do 'Women move in both shadow and formal systems, like shamans, have a foot in both worlds- are on the edge, subversive'	But - when women do move out of shared worlds and into different worlds crisis may be precipitated between them
	Women's investment in formal systems differs with access to position power	Women use elaborate ways of signalling their positioning and value base. in relation to formal and informal systems –
	Women socialising together risk undermining their professional position / identity in the eyes of male colleagues Male peers assume opposition/subversion where women cross boundaries set by the organisation and male order of power and hierarchy – and try to keep women apart	If a man takes a secretary out for lunch he's doing that whereas if a woman takes her secretary out to lunch that's two women together, so she's defined by the secretarial position When a woman manager took part in a girls night out some of her senior male colleagues said do you think as a senior you should be doing that? they even had one of the men turning up at the Indian restaurant they were at to hear what they were saying because it seen as what are the women plotting

In the following analysis of the session I describe the pattern and content of our exchange:

The pattern of the interview mirrored C's description of building relationships with women clients and peers based on empathy and collaboration. She moved between life and professional issues to illustrate her stance and we both used the occasion to invite the other to explore and sense make.

The interview developed into a joint discussion, moving back and forth between examples each of us brought to illustrate or to explore in order to make sense of interactions

between women. Quite often these were contrasted to interactions with men – as if women/man interactions were needed as a comparison in order to check our sense making of woman to woman interactions. This is illustrated in the following, where we are discussing woman to woman relationships in a mixed environment:

> M: *Working with male colleagues both in my teaching and consulting I'm always on guard monitoring how men and women are relating to each of us and noticing at what points in the conversation I am being spoken to and my male colleague is being spoken to and having to work quite hard not to give up keep being proactive, not to be seen by other women as the woman who has been brought along and is just sitting in...*
> C: *Especially when you get that triangulation because once you lose their attention its quite difficult to get it back – I find a similar thing being very conscious of how long has the attention been with my male colleague and are they beginning to stray into the area which is my expertise and I need to asset my right here and do it in such a way that I do not come over as a pushy aggressive woman and keeping that balance and not fading into the wallpaper...*
> M: *But in order to be able to function in these conditions one has to work really hard on one's sense of self, doesn't one? to maintain that role with confidence and not to be eroded by it...*
> C*: And it's a constant you have to keep on your guard and I find I hear the inner messages that have been in there for years and I have to fight those as well; [ask yourself] do you really believe that or is it just hanging around from somewhere, and not being pulled into that, oh well and ...and if you're tired and have a headache you feel 'let them get on with it!' and you can't really do that one day and then say 'let me have my rightful place now', so it can be quite difficult!*

Later C suggested that women were expected to look after the boundaries between friendship and professional relating. Moreover for many women having a woman consultant may have been preferable because as clients they were not having to be 'on guard' against having their power usurped:

> C: *Maybe that's why so many women end up being consultants because that means being the one that manages the boundaries. You might as well get paid for it if you're going to be lumbered with it!*
> Me*: Why would women want to have us as consultants? Would that not signal lower status for them? There must be ambiguity there...*

C: *Yes I think there is, depending on what they want to use us for. Many women may feel more comfortable; as our clients they should have the power and I wonder what the power is with the man in the suit consultant: does he usurp the power? A female colleague in a very high powered position had to work hard to establish that 'hang on I'm the client here', because a male consultant who had worked fine with a male manager started very subtly on 'what you need to do, dear, is this'; and it was' hang on a minute I'm the client here...lets make one thing clear...maybe there is the association thing but it works the other way here'.*
Me*: And then there's how that is viewed by other women..*
C: *Whereas another woman collaborating can still maintain that subtle power relationship of 'yes we're collaborating really closely here and we share a value here and we can work collaboratively and I'm the client and so I maintain that slight edge'*

C was sustained by her sense of self-liberation. The following illustrates her self-positioning and the relationship between this and the stance she takes up in her professional role as leader of a women's development programme.

C: *My role is to challenge huge assumptions in the organisation [and in women who come on the leadership challenge course] that it's worse for women, that women are the only ones to lose out in the re-organisation, and that I am supposed to be on their side; that if women are not appointed this is proof that the men are out to get them again; that its better to have a women appointed or in a senior post regardless of her agenda or stance.*
.....
It's about being able to embrace the feminine and celebrate it and celebrate masculine energy too...Most [men and women] have a fair mixture of both – I think the fundamental value underneath celebrating diversity is brilliant
Me*: I think so too as long as one can keep hold of the frame, which recognises social structures and power....*
C: *Yes*
Both: *[Laughter]*
End of tape

I came away from the interview feeling exhausted. My 'friendly' approach to the interview, empathy and relationship- building, made it harder for me to keep to my own time

boundaries or to conserve my energy. In listening to the tape I could hear my energy fading only towards the end; the richness and quality of material justified the time entirely.

There were moments when I caught myself feeling more attuned to the women on C's leadership development programme who longed for nurturing, or to seek comfort – and generate energy - in shared 'fight'. When this happened I worked to reposition myself as 'consultants reflecting together'. I was aware of the danger of losing my own political stance because of my desire to speak from a position of consensus and reintroduced a specific reference to power at the end of the taped session. It strikes me now that I was working hard to be 'on guard' against my own desire to turn the interview into a consensus based, nurturing space. In feminist research on friendships between women a pattern of 'merged attachment' is contrasted to 'separated attachment' as a basis for intimacy between women (Orbach and Eichenbaum 1994). In my analysis and during interviews I used this distinction as I tracked my own desire to merge at points where it was difficult to maintain subject to subject dialogue (Benjamin 1990; 1995).

Themes from this discussion proved central in further cycles of my inquiry, and are developed in my case studies. These were: the generative and degenerative aspects of fluid boundaries and collaborative approaches; the tension between desire for shared views and nurturing and the need for challenge in order to be effective as an individual in a leadership position.

Findings 1

Women to women workplace interactions

In this section I map the main themes which emerged from my discussions with contributors. I draw from contributors' accounts of their experiences of working with women in organisations and from their statements about their sense making frames.

Discussion with contributors' moved between narrative accounts of women to women interactions and joint discussion about how to make sense of these. Narratives were often qualified or compared to patterns of interaction between women and men. Three of the contributors (A, C, E) situated their sense making frameworks in personal belief systems

or narratives of how they came to their current beliefs about women's equality. All contributors situated their accounts within specific organisational contexts and referred to women and men in specific work-related roles. Each contributor also made statements about the key factors they considered to be influencing women to women relating in professional roles. These included identity issues such as culture, ethnicity, generation and sexuality.

Some contributors challenged my focus on women to women dynamics and expressed reservations about making any general statements or observations about women in professional roles (F, A, B); others (C, D, E) seemed more at ease with the framework I offered.

Challenge was particularly vigorous from A and B, interestingly from ideologically opposed positions and from very different organisational contexts (A: lesbian feminist ideology, feminist women's organisation; B: culture difference rather than gender lens, corporate mixed organisation). Each stated that my approach implied general statements about gender difference with which they did not identify.

All but one contributor (B) used my approach, for the purposes of the interview, to explore incidents and dilemmas with which they were preoccupied (A, D, E, F), or an aspect of their consultancy practice (C, D, E, F). In one case, F, where the contributor was also my client, we used the interview to jointly explore aspects or our client / consultant relationship. I explore this in more depth in case study 2.

In most of the interviews, it was hard to develop discussion about women to women interactions or to sustain focus on these without reference to men. It was as if the subject 'women to women' could have meaning only by comparison with an externally defined gendered norm and as if contributors were more willing to make generalisations about men than about women. In some cases (A and B), I had a strong sense that they perceived danger in identifying women-specific dynamics, as if women would be defined as lacking and this needed to be defended against. For example (in interviews A and B), men were either 'doing it better' or 'not as well'; assertions were made and illustrated about women's equal competence, alongside negative examples of women in competition not working together effectively. Women-specific qualities and ways of working together

were described (in interviews C and D) in a context of gender relations – women developing strategies for leadership in mixed gender environments. C, E and F described women-only spaces within organisations in which women had developed their own ways of working. Within these spaces, women did value each other; their ability and willingness to accredit this joint work outside these environments was at issue.

Each interview took on a life and dynamic of its own; a quality of interaction which I maintain conveyed a sense of the contributor's approach and preferred way of being in her professional or work role. This was sometimes different to the quality of our interaction in other contexts. In the next section, I will analyse this as an element of their contribution to the research.

I summarised the content of contributors' discussions under cross-cutting themes that emerged from their accounts. The first of these was 'what women bring to work roles: gender differences identified by contributors'. This addressed generative and degenerative attributes which contributors associated with women and their positive experiences of women to women dynamics. The second explored what sense making frames contributors used to explain the specificity of women to women interactions. These were grouped under 'political and social environment'; 'alternative values and belief systems'; 'life experience, learned behaviour and ways of being'; and 'gender norms and socialisation'. I have appended a full analysis of these themes in appendix 4.

Contributors did describe an identifiable set of qualities which women brought to professional roles – and which they believed were more likely to come into play in relation to other women. These took generative and degenerative forms and seemed related to a paradigm of 'effective working' held by contributors. This paradigm combined nurturing and challenge, empathy and respect for relationships with attention to organisational task; paid attention to individual needs without being bound by them; sustained a reciprocal sense of being valued by women while taking on a powerful role in the external world; and enacted fluid boundaries between friendship and work. However, in contributors' accounts, these qualities were seldom valued in the organisational or social environments in which women were working.

In the only women's organisation described, the funding and political environment was seen as actively undermining feminist goals and working methods, making it harder to sustain positive working relationships. In mixed organisations, several contributors described women being faced with a choice: to stick together in oppositional marginal roles or to perform to norms set by organisational goals and culture, in order to succeed as individuals. Women who chose the second pathway were moving between two worlds; they often faced loss of friendship and sometimes hostility and envy from other women who remained in oppositional roles. Trust between women seemed often to be based on shared identity and this could not be sustained so easily between women who were successful in the public arena, or in their organisations, and those who did not get wider recognition.

Contributors did describe their enjoyment of positive work-based relationships with women: connecting easily through shared humour, paying attention to the individual and not the role, shared values, jointly building something, sharing passion for the work, working creatively through shared projects and ideas, buzz and fun. I have said that these positive and enjoyable experiences were nevertheless described with ambivalence. Contributors did not identify these positive experiences easily – it was as if they needed time and space to identify them – to pull them out from a tangled mass of painful experiences and taboos. One contributor (E) spoke of male hostility and suspicion at social contact between women at different levels in her organisation. It was as if women's professional identity was easily lost sight of, within an order of power that was not designed to sustain them in their professional identities (McIntosh 1985, 1989). Some women had learned to navigate between the different worlds of work-based and socially-determined expectations but also needed to learn to sustain positive relationships with other women who were located within each of the worlds within which they moved.

My contributors did not speak of successfully sustaining relationships with women across differences of power. Many of their stories were of failure, of painful breakdown of relationships as they moved between different worlds. The evidence suggests that while they all valued the positive aspects they described of woman to woman work relationships they shared different degrees of disappointment and pain around the negative aspects they had identified.

Each of them considered it essential to have an affirmative alternative value base to sustain them in their own way of being (A, C, E, F) or to have learned experience of how to use power and maintain their authority (A, B, C;D, E, F) in professional settings. None of them considered either the value base or the attributes they brought from socialisation as adequate to equip them to deal with the realities of expectations and responses from men or women in work-based relationships.

The joint sense making in which we engaged to understand this spoke of the importance of a sustaining political and organisational environment. It also reflected back to women a sense of their achievements in order to counter actively the devaluing of these achievements in society and their organisations. Furthermore we emphasised the importance of inner world change and of learning skills associated with travelling between different worlds.

What these contributions suggested was that women needed an ability to work against social conditioning – their own and others' - in order to access and exercise power and followship. They needed this in relation to each other, as well as in relation to men. Women needed to navigate between the different worlds of professional work-based relationships and social expectations and to develop a set of competencies and belief systems that were adapted to that challenge. However, this was not stated explicitly by contributors - nor is it necessarily a conclusion that they each would share.

Power, trust and collaboration between women

All the contributors told stories that richly illustrated how they worked with the dilemmas that these dynamics provoked. Their stories (see contributors' tables for summaries) referred to building and sustaining their authority with men as well as women (all except A); to working with their own inner worlds (A, B, C, E, F); to cultural difference in relation to gender-based expectations (B, C); and to the impact of changed political context and environment (A, E).

In this analysis, I selected a cluster of issues that contributors brought to my inquiry and which resonated with my own 'live' material. Similar dilemmas had appeared in my previous research (Page 1992, 1994; Evelyn Oldfield 1999) and are core themes of my

inquiry within my case studies (chapters 9 – 11). I present them as a range of different views expressed by contributors about a set of strongly-held dilemmas about power, trust and collaboration between women working on women's equality initiatives and women in more senior positions of power with generic responsibilities. These dilemmas drew meaning from their timing and historical context. They included but were not confined to complex issues about individual advancement in a context of possibility created by collective feminist action to achieve change. Contributors B and D did not describe these dilemmas and significantly were the only ones not discussing women's equality work. These dilemmas also concerned expectations with no clear relationship to political context.

This section is intended as an initial sketch of dilemmas that I will explore and conceptualise in greater depth in later cycles of inquiry. I have presented my analysis under subheadings as a series of linked themes.

Feeling valued, feeling powerful

For each of the contributors *feeling powerful* seemed to be associated with a sense of *being valued* and *valuing the work of other women.* Several expressed ambivalence about position power. This seemed linked to the experience of not being valued or fearing that they might not be liked. Feeling powerful through relationship to others by whom they were valued and liked seemed to be closely interlinked.

All the contributors except B reported negative experiences in relation to women in powerful positions. This seemed to relate to an experience of *not being valued* or *not being supported* by a woman boss who was more closely identified with the predominant organisational culture. F, for example, a local authority equalities officer, felt that her work fell outside her organisation's priorities on two counts: her interactive, consultative approach to policy work and her European project work:

> F: *That's how I work – creative, out there with people, discussing with them...*
> *Me: Does the outcome culture constrain you working in this way?*
> F: *No, because that's what it's about... producing results, making things happen, that's what gives me a buzz....the fact that I'm out there hustling and agitating, working and creating is somehow seen as not serious work...but I connect with*

other people out there and it's necessary to get things done...to get policy drawn up..

Later, F expressed a different set of reservations about the value of her work in the eyes of the organisation. In our discussion, we explored the dynamics between us in working together on the Persephone project in client/consultant roles. F described how she felt when I had challenged her to explore how to validate project results in terms of the priorities of her organisation. In the following exchange, she articulates a dilemma to which other contributors also refer:

F*: I find it difficult to be your boss. I just want to curl up in your arms ...when you push me on this, I think 'hell I have to perform for her as well [as everyone else] demonstrate results'...it makes me freeze....what are the results we can show to others in this area ... more exploration is what I need..*
M: But that is the language you use isn't it?
F*: Yes but I couldn't see how to do it in relation to this project ... I am more connected to it now...I can see the connections and the agendas...social exclusion and Best Value and the whole thing about governance and democracy...just to get them to do age and gender monitoring would do! A proper database...God!*
M: *Do you mean when I say 'let's have a strategic discussion' you feel bullied....*
F: *It's the ...pressure to demonstrate results... It makes me feel O God I haven't done it....must be an old tape in my head....of a head mistress.*

The Persephone project had provided a rare space for affirmation and regeneration without constant requirement to justify the value of an interactive work style or of women's equality work in a European context. However to survive, this work needed to be justified in the organisation's terms. F experienced the challenge to address this within the consultancy relationship as a violation of its affirming qualities - and felt bullied and disempowered. In my second case study, I show how we worked with these dynamics through my inquiry.

Individual success, collective betrayal

As a senior woman, C described her experience of a similar tension between nurturing and challenge. Feminist women colleagues in her organisation did not trust her once she

had demonstrated that she could perform within the male culture and moved out of a position she described as 'victim role' in relation to male managers. Both they and women participants on her leadership programmes expected her to join them in their oppositional stance. C interpreted this as an expectation that she affirm them as powerless in relation to men. As a result of moving away from this oppositional stance and becoming successful in the organisation, she lost some of her friendships:

> *What we try and promote [on the women's leadership challenge course] is the choices they have in their different organisational cultures – and consequences of different ways of being a leader - one choice is to leave, let go of old agendas.... this can be painful.*

Trust and feminist political loyalties seemed to be at stake here. Women's equality had been fought collectively – yet success was reaped by individuals. This left ambiguous the relationships between individual successful women in organisations and feminist women involved in that collective movement.

A told the following story that illustrated this dynamic in her feminist organisation:

> A: *In the end, they forced X out.. because she was successful.*
> M: *Professionally successful?*
> A: *She's written books.. She's successful, she's somebody in the women's movement and they couldn't bear it....why didn't they do it themselves? I find it really difficult to understand that resentment....they prefer to actually stop things happening than see anything happen at all that might achieve something for women, change for women...*

In this story feminist women did not make an assessment of whether individual success was in conflict with collective goals; instead they experienced success in the public sphere of one of their members as in itself a betrayal.

In her interview A expressed sadness that women did not value each other enough and suggested that this made disagreement between women problematic:

Disagreement is confused with not valuing each other...I think that's where it's tied up with identity – who you are – who else you have in something common with - having a sense of that.

In response I reflected that if women were acting in environments which did not reflect back a sense of being positively valued, then how much more threatening it would be when one is rewarded and others continued to experience themselves as devalued.

Coded loyalty: mutual recognition

C spoke of crises of trust she experienced as she moved between different roles and in different peer groups.

We explored how women (and men) used codes to read each other's value position – in order to work out how to position themselves within a group or partnership. In the following, C responded to my story about a dilemma around whether to match my dress to the client or my consultant colleagues when preparing to meet a client:

C: I'm working in association with you so when you go to see the client, you're us; if you want to dress and act differently where does that leave me?
If you are no longer 'one of the girls' – who are you? And if you are no longer 'you' in relation to my 'me' – then who am I?

The issue was how could I dress appropriately for my client when my colleagues might read this as a betrayal of feminist values? How could I maintain my feminist identity, and assert my credibility in the mainstream? If dress is code for affiliation on the basis of common values, trust was needed to assert affiliation outside feminist relationships.

In D's account, women built relationships through physical attunement, attention to bodily needs and physical appearance:

I think it's really just small things ..I was thinking about that this morning ... Very often when you go to meet women, they provide food and that sort of thing ... I was working with another associate and she travelled from Wimbledon and the

thing that really outraged her was that he [male client] didn't even offer her a cup of tea whereas with J [woman client] you know she breezed in to this meeting and she had got the biscuits with her and it was 'oh faith' she said 'let's get this sorted out' and she looked at me and said, 'D that's a really lovely scarf you've got on' and equally I would say to her: 'Oh J that's a great hat' and all that sort of thing ..

Asserting power: abuse, nurture or challenge?

Both A, E and F told stories of trouble with asserting – or challenging – women who are exercising 'power over'. In these stories, legitimate use of position power was portrayed with ambivalence, as if closely associated with abuse of power. E referred apologetically to her first management experience as 'believing that it was enough to tell people what to do' and talked about working with women's organisations who were 'denying power dynamics'. F described herself as 'going into 'fuhrer mode' when she asserted her role as project leader and was preoccupied with how this was perceived by the other women. In the following interaction, it is clear that I as her consultant am identifying with the dilemmas that F is exploring:

F: *I think I have difficulty with the management role of being in charge and one of the girls...I think there is a difficulty and that's with the whole of the transnational partnership as well...I can't just be one of the girls or one of the partners.*
M: *That's what happens when we get to the meetings...you disappear into become one of the girls..*
F: *That's where I want to be; I don't want to be in charge I want, yup.*
M: *Umm I want to come too..yes..[laugh]*
F: *Yeah*
M: *That's what's hard...*
F: *And I think we all do that ....*
M: *Umm*
F*: Ummm*
M: *Yeah*
F: *Yeah*
M: *So that's a difficulty?*
F: *Yeah and I don't know that the transnational partners understand that...or they may be conscious or aware of it at some level...*
M: *What - your wanting to be one of the girls or manager...?*

F: *The two things - the tension between the two ...then there are times that I say come on let's do this and I get into, I don't know, Fuhrer mode, you know...That's what I feel ...fuhrer mode that's it ...as if asserting feels like being a fuhrer - ummm.*

In contrast D described moments where she had to make a judgement about whether to support an individual or challenge her, in order to support the process related to the task. She showed that she was able to make this judgement, in a way that kept in balance social expectations of her as a woman and the organisational and professional tasks:

I was conscious that she was under a lot of pressure and she was very committed to the project and ...again it was that difficulty of feeling you had to challenge professionally but how to do it without undermining your nurturing role.

Mainstream or margins: sustaining trust between women

Contributors' stories seemed to circle around a set of linked dilemmas. They drew strength from feeling valued – and also experienced women colleagues and clients looking to them to gain a sense of being valued. But most of them faced a choice: being valued by women as 'one of the girls' or seeking to be valued on their organisation's values and priorities.

Being one of the girls meant not exercising power but being equal. If they exercised organisation position power, in relation to women, it began to feel abusive and to be experienced as such. They then risked being cast out, losing affiliation and affinity. Yet they could not rely on being valued in the mainstream either, where they faced another set of gender dynamics.

In order to be trusted and to trust other women, they felt they needed to demonstrate and signal 'togetherness' and this seemed to mean shared oppositional stance on the margins. Togetherness in success for women felt like a contradiction in terms and individuals who went 'outside' the circle of women's bonds were often experienced as traitors, operating to a different set of values and therefore no longer trustworthy. They were perceived as 'controlled', 'remote' and sometimes undermined women's solidarity and the equalities work other women had been carrying.

These contributors seemed to be signalling that they and/or women with whom they worked faced a paradox. In these organisations, which included women's organisations, they were struggling with stark choices. Once choice was to remain in the ranks of women who positioned themselves as powerless and ineffective in order to retain affiliation and trust of their fellow travellers. Another was to move on and lose this trust, affiliation and affirmation.

At stake seemed to be the terms and basis of being valued and trusted. Underneath this there seemed to be something much more profound concerning identity and affiliation. Contributors faced choices of by whom and on what terms they wished to be valued. Linked to this were dilemmas about how to construct and sustain their integrity and a self-sense which felt affirming. Feeling powerful for these women seemed to be linked to a sense of feeling valued, but in both mixed and women's organisation##s they found this extraordinarily difficult to attain and sustain.

Collaboration between women

The material suggested to me that each contributor independently of ideological stance, role, identity or sector, seemed to have developed a similar paradigm of 'effective working'. This paradigm combined nurturing and challenge, empathy and respect for relationship with attention to organisational task and attention to individual needs without being bound by them or holding back from taking on a powerful role in the public world. In doing so they entered dangerous terrain. They risked loss of friendship from women who perceived them as breaking ranks or envied their success. Because of gender stereotyping and the resistance of women who challenged them this risked isolation and hostility. Was this because the women who had been their peers felt in some way devalued by their success?

Several contributors spoke of creating women's projects or organisations which valued women in strong roles that did not fit gender stereotypes (A, E, C). Yet these environments were not immune to destructive dynamics; they were a necessary but not a sufficient condition for women to sustain relationships based on valuing each other.

What are the conditions or competencies that allow women to support each other's endeavours and successes within the public sphere outside these women's projects and organisations? How can women sustain these conditions sufficiently to recognise and support individual success in ways that also honour the feminist collective movement for social change that has created the conditions that made their individual success possible? And in particular, how do women consultants position themselves in relation to these dynamics in their work with women clients? And how are these dilemmas represented – if at all – in the consultancy literature? What can feminist writings offer the consultancy field in this respect?

Women consultants have to work with these dynamics with women clients in specific professional contexts. They must establish and maintain generative relationships with their clients who will experience expectations and desires for affirmation, trust and solidarity. The consultant must respond to these needs, but also keep organisational roles and goals in focus. The usual consultancy dilemma of challenge versus support is charged with an additional dynamic of specific expectations and desires that arise between women.

I engaged with these questions in greater depth as my inquiry developed. In the next section I analyse contributors' accounts of how they approached these dilemmas within their consultancy practice.

How contributors worked with power and authority dilemmas

Contributors C, E and F named and explored in some detail the dilemmas associated with how to maintain affiliation with women on the margins while achieving success in the mainstream. C and E had found spiritual practices and philosophies that enabled them to take up a new stance and from which they drew support to act from their new position. This had involved considerable work in their inner worlds and on their sense of self in relation to others in professional and personal worlds. C described her experience as follows:

> *When I discovered the fundamental idea of free will, even if only the free will to react to what's going on, I found that very painful because I couldn't be a victim*

any more and blame anyone else any more. Sometimes being in a victim position is comfortable because then you don't have to make any choices - its quite a huge shift - some women are stuck because they really do not see that as an option.

From their new stance C and E worked with women and women's organisations (E) to offer them opportunities to access the choices they felt they now enjoyed and to move away from old scripts. C described how this meant continuing to work in depth to counter her own internalised socialisation:

M*: Going back to you in your role as course director how do you manage the reality you describe that so many women who come on your programmes have bought into victim position and are disappointed when they do not get supported in it? What sort of feelings does that generate in you? how do you manage that?*

C: *Very uncomfortable because of my own conditioning. It could be a very easy week, I could give them the nurturing and they would go away happy. I am of a generation where that was expected - my own mother worked while I was being brought up but number one priority was still the nurturing; it's very difficult! The way I deal with it is to think I'm giving people what they need not what they want; also to keep reminding myself I'm there to challenge in a supportive way not to be prescriptive and I have to be very conscious of what's my stuff. Sometimes it can feel bloody awful and I wonder why I bother.*

E described her work with women's organisations as follows:

I always acknowledge people when I go into women's organisations because I know how much women's work has been devalued ....as women we focus on what we've not done or achieved...and don't stop and say what have we done/achieved.

She actively countered the devalued sense of achievement that she believes disempowered members of women's organisations, placing their achievements and the forces against them in political and historical context, and their own life cycle. She described herself as 'holding up a mirror' to transform self-perception, countering women's low self-esteem, and encouraging them to enlarge their vision of their self-potential. She

was the only one who explicitly drew upon political contexts to enable contributors to make sense of their experience of being devalued. In contrast C worked within a management developmental frame, challenging her participants to acknowledge the constraints of gender role stereotyping for men as well as for women.

In the quote at the beginning of this section Fspoke about the pain she felt at being challenged by me as her consultant to consider strategies for taking the project work into the mainstream of her organisation. She struggled with anger at receiving challenge instead of nurturing, feeling judged and found wanting, being not good enough to succeed on the organisations' terms, and then saw a way of taking up the challenge within the systems and priorities of the wider organisation.

Contributors seemed to be suggesting that generative use of power by feminists in relation to other women involved nurturing and challenge, caring about the individual within a nurturing space and caring about how that individual would act as an agent of change within the mainstream. They described women as needing and seeking caring and nurturing from each other, and described themselves as seeking to give and receive without sacrificing task and effective performance to meet organisational goals. However because they were working in environments which did not value the caring, nurturing elements and sometimes saw them as in conflict with effective performance, it was difficult to think outside this split. The idea that professional relationships should not be friendships and that emotional detachment was necessary to perform to task were the rules which women and men were expected to keep, and which most contributors described themselves as following.

Yet their descriptions of how they related to their women clients and colleagues showed that they were telling this story slant: there was a difference in how they worked with women who they trusted and with men, and the difference was in how they interpreted the boundaries between friendship and professional relating, emotion and task. As contributor D said in response to an example from me:

> *It is possible to care for the individual and the process, although this may be misinterpreted by male colleagues or clients who tend to sexualise this way of relating - and by women working to this model.*

In contributors' stories women in power were regarded as either providing or betraying these needs for care. Their success in the public sphere was often envied, and sometimes received with a hostile response appropriate to an attack. An attack on a shared sense of self that may have been shattered by individual success may well have been what colleagues experienced (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1983).

Contributors described their strategies and struggles to hold the two together. Their stories, like the dynamics of the interviews, show them moving between the two ways of being, now combining them, now separating, now adjusting the equilibrium in interaction with others.

This theme and its associated tensions resonated strongly for me as I reflected on my own developmental path during the course of this inquiry. In the case studies that follow I explore how I worked with them within my own consultancy relationships with women clients. I conceptualise them more fully as my inquiry develops.

First, in subsection Findings 2 below, I explore the interactions between contributors and myself within the interviews, and relate these to the verbal content that I have summarised and analysed above.

Findings 2

As I listened to interview tapes and analysed the transcripts I had a strong sense that there was a relationship between the dynamics described by my contributors and the dynamics enacted between contributors and myself; between the explicit and implicit content of the interview discussions. I wanted to make a preliminary exploration of how I might conceptualise this relationship and of how to include the implicit content in my inquiry. This was effectively a first step in developing a methodology able to make the implicit explicit, to address unconscious dynamics in order to explore the relational aspects of how women work together. It was also a way of including my own experiential material, drawing on my own reflexive practices, in the data and analysis of the interviews which made up this cycle of inquiry.

In writing this my approach was shaped by the notion of 'implicit relational mode', a key concept drawn from relational psychology (Lyons-Ruth 1998; Stern 1998). This concept, developed by psychoanalysts interested in understanding the dynamics between therapist and client, refers to the music behind the words, the unique quality and pattern of interaction bestrewn any two individuals. In their research there are specific moments which mark points of transition in their interaction, moments where a change in awareness takes place, where new understanding passes between therapist and client. While I did not expect to find this happening in an interview situation, I was interested in exploring pattern, and whether there was a quality that could usefully be described as implicit relational mode in these interviews.

My notes showed that my experience of the interview dynamics resonated powerfully with my experience of relationships with women clients. There were also interesting parallels and contrasts between the interview dynamics and the dynamics of relationships with women described by contributors. I start with my experiences and then move back to contributors' descriptions.

In both A and B, my first two interviews, I had an established friendship with contributors. In each case far from reproducing the interaction and content to which I was used, the discussion marked an unanticipated shift in our usual way of relating. In case A the inquiry introduced challenge, engagement with different views – and modelled positive aspects of working relationships described by the contributor. In case B reservations with the gender frame that I introduced seemed to mirror negative associations with specifying gender difference in the corporate culture which B described (see Introduction to Findings 1 and 2 above).

In both interviews there were points of convergence where contributors seemed willing to engage with the frame I was offering and to find it illuminating, and points of resistance and challenge where my frame was contested and the contributor reasserted their own stance:

> M: *What I'm interested in exploring is ..and I know there may not be straightforward answers - what you experienced in that team as a woman of a certain cultural background, as well as in your consultancy. Let's start when you came into the team: did you have any specific expectations?*
> B: *No none whatsoever, none whatsoever!*

M*: You didn't expect to be valued or perceived treated in any particular way because of your gender?*

B: *No!*

M: *That must be quite unusual?*

B*: That's how I am [voice rising] and what I said on the telephone. It would be very hard for me to really look at that – it never crossed my mind!*

M*: Yes, yes.*

B: *It never crossed my mind in the US – maybe because the person I was reporting to was a woman, a woman headed the whole department. [thoughtful] There was definitely in meetings no hint of any different attitudes and I felt very comfortable with people my age...slightly uncomfortable with men in their early 60s who probably didn't have much exposure experience of women in the workplace but for anyone up to the age of 50 or so it was not an issue ..maybe the only thing I can think of is we can bring different approaches in how we deal with situations and if anything it was very healthy to have both males and females on the team and there was no feeling you were not one of the gang.*

In this interaction my introduction was clumsy; I introduced the subject as an 'expectation' of different treatment – a position with which B does not wish to be associated and from which she vigorously dissociates. Then when I accept her rejection of unequal treatment she was able to move on to explore specificity of interactions between women as a possibility.

Interviews with C and E were the longest and most demanding in terms of energy, perhaps enacting the quality of attention that they each gave to clients. My interview with F was a mutual exploration of the tension between desire to be cared for and the need for challenge, the desire to be sharing power and the need to assert position power. The interview with D was the most relaxed; she was also the contributor who named the need to manage the tension between care for the individual and care for the consultancy process.

Reading the notes I had made immediately after each interview brought to my attention a cluster of my own dilemmas around how to retain a sense of self in dialogue. I experienced this physically, through changes in energy level and emotion. Each interview had its own distinct quality of interaction and rhythm. For example at the end of interviews

C and E I recorded a feeling of loss of self, drained and exhausted, and of difficulty in each of sticking to time boundaries. The feeling of well being and easy exchange with D contrasted with the feeling of being 'at sea' in interview B, linked to my fear of having pushed her into territory she had no wish to explore and use of a paradigm with which she could not identify.

It seemed that in each interaction we were enacting some element of the interactions they had described with women colleagues or clients. I was aware that I was playing an active part in this as I experienced changes in energy level as I was drawn into 'nurturing' or energised through challenge and dialogue.

This was hard to capture in my analysis as much of the interaction was conveyed in voice tone, pauses and intonation. Through analysis I saw that I shared much of the paradigm described by contributors of holding in balance nurturing and working to task. Interview tapes are full of the sound of tea being poured, food munched, the buzz of conversation in the places of domesticity or leisure in which we met. There was an ebb and flow of challenge or attunement to the emotional content expressed by contributors, as I tried to enable contributors to find their experiential base from which to engage with the research subject.

In its generative form as I experienced it this balance between nurturing and working to task resulted in a dialogue, in which each seemed to be actively contributing their part to the process and content. Differences of opinion were acknowledged and new thinking as well as a sense of affirmation was achieved through the process. In its degenerative form the process became draining; perhaps too much of my energy went into attunement to the contributor and not enough into direct expression of self as differences of experience and of analysis became blurred.

I encouraged contributors to move between experience in their personal and in their professional lives and to use the session as an opportunity for sense making and new thinking. The interviews do all convey a sense of connecting easily with each other on the level of ideas, creativity, and shared humour.

However these were not static experiences; the interviews moved and flowed, as I used my role as inquirer and the framework I had created for the interviews to gain a stronger sense of dialogue within each relationship, actively working to enable an interaction between equals, each offering an experience and then engaging in joint sense making of it, a process of challenge as well as attunement. To achieve this I had to work, as some of my contributors described themselves doing, with my inner world as well as in relation to the contributors (C), balancing care for the individual with care for the task in hand (D). The process was demanding, challenging and rewarding as a developmental process. It produced unexpected learning and change for myself as well as for contributors.

Conclusions

I started my inquiry into 'what happens between women in organisations' with a hunch that underneath diversity of identity, stance, social and organisational positioning, there might be a set of expectations that informs interactions between women and adds an edge or 'charge' to them. In my own experience this has certainly been the case. I set out through these interviews to understand more what this 'charge' between women might be and how it might be conceptualised.

I also set out to map the territory of how these women experienced women to women relationships in work settings. Through the interviews I set out to identify patterns within their experiences and to compare how they made sense of them to my own analysis.

The process of conducting the interviews and then of doing this analysis, has been deeply satisfying in a way I had not anticipated. Engaging with my contributors and then writing my own analysis has been energising and has brought me a sense of validation, a sense that at last I have been able to open up and express a part of myself and be heard. This is not entirely dependent on you the readers – although knowing that this will be read, that it is in the public arena, is what is making the difference. It is also about daring to listen to this part of myself, to allow this part of myself to speak, a sense of self-acceptance which is new and invigorating.

Hearing myself say this, I can see that this process of engaging with others in order to discover and connect with silent parts of myself is at the core of my inquiry methodology. Furthermore enabling others to engage with hidden parts of themselves, to find a sense of valuing and of being valued in and through relationship to others, has always been at the core of my professional practice.

As my interview summaries show, contributors found that the process of gaining a sense of being heard and/or valued was precarious. They spoke through different conceptual frames about a similar set of dynamics. These dynamics concerned qualities and expectations that they brought into professional relationships and that were seldom valued. They described these in relation to women peers, colleagues, bosses, consultants, and clients - women in professional or organisational roles. I too experienced my own dilemmas about being heard and valued in relation to my contributors and these were played out between us during the interview.

I found it hard to develop or introduce a discussion about women to women interactions without reference to men. In most cases my contributors did too. In retrospect being asked to focus on women's relationships to women implied being able to distinguish what was special or different from women to men. For some contributors this was not something they had considered before and was dangerous, because naming gender difference was associated in their organisational cultures with women being less competent.

Contributors did describe an identifiable set of qualities which women brought to professional roles – and which they thought were more likely to come into play in relation to other women. These took generative and degenerative forms; I describe them in detail in the interview summary tables and analysis of findings. However contributors did not make generic claims hat women are different to men; they did not suggest that these dynamics applied to all women, or that they were exclusive to women to women interactions. Throughout each discussion they qualified their observations with references to specificity of context, age, culture, and to differences in women's experience of gender difference.

While contributors described similar patterns of interaction between women, none of them were willing to make general statements about their experience of dynamics between

women. Neither however were they neutral about the subject. The elusive quality to discussion of women to women as opposed to gender dynamics, and the emotional content and tone of our discussions confirmed my initial feeling that this was an area of difficulty for which we do not yet have adequate language.

There are linked questions which emerged for me from the experience of completing this cycle of inquiry, and which I intend to address in inquiry tracks which will focus on my own consultancy practice. They concern how I worked as a consultant with the dynamics of mis/trust between women in working environments and how I tried to create environments within which women were able to provide for each other a sense of the value of their work. Linked to this are questions concerning my ability to sustain myself; in what ways I felt valued or not, and how I sustained a sufficient sense of my own value to sustain my own professional practice. I address these themes directly in the following chapter and in my case studies.

My contributors linked trust with questions around identity and power: how can or do women in organisational roles sustain a sense of identity-in-relationship when they inhabit and are moving between different worlds and when these worlds value different qualities and ways of relating? And in which they hold unequal positions of power? How can they balance nurturing, attention to caring for individuals, and attention and caring for task in environments which do not value women as equals? How can feminist women sustain a sense of self-worth and integrity within 'mainstream' organisations?

These questions resonate with issues of my own which surfaced in my interview process around how to create a dialogue in which I can sustain a sense of separate self. In chapter 4 I showed how this theme has been in the foreground for me in developing my consultancy profile in relation to women in positions of power.

Contributors often had to choose the terms on which they wished to be valued and linked to this, how to construct and sustain a self-sense which maintained their integrity. It seemed likely that feeling powerful was in some way dependent on this self-sense. I am reminded of my previous research where women in positions of power stated that they did not feel powerful (Page and Lorandi 1992). Feeling powerful for women seemed to

depend on a sense of feeling valued but in both mixed and women's organisations they seemed to find this sense extraordinarily difficult to attain and to sustain.

In this cycle I developed a methodology appropriate to this cycle of my inquiry. This enabled me to trace the similarities and contrasts between the pattern of interaction between contributors and myself, and the explicit content of the interviews. Identifying and beginning to understand this intersubjective field as a kind of knowing feels fruitful for my consultancy and inquiry practices; I explore this further in my inquiry 'On the Borderlands of Yearning and Un / belonging', and develop it further in my case studies.

Several contributors directly challenged my conceptual frame; from each of them I took key methodological points which become organising concepts within subsequent cycles of inquiry. Among these was the need to situate my inquiry as a feminist project in its political and historical context and to distinguish between feminist and gender specific statements. Another was to specify the organisational context from which material is drawn. Exploring further what conceptual tools I can develop and use to develop my understanding and inform my practice will be integral to the rest of my inquiry.

During the two-year period in which I conducted this cycle of inquiry I read and critiqued feminist literature on women in management and leadership. Much of this literature is concerned with debates about gender specific leadership style. During this time I became less interested in gender difference and more interested in performative accounts of how women 'do' gender (Gherardi 1995). In preparation for a research contract I made a summary of this literature, illustrating different approaches to understanding women's position in organisations. This research contract became the subject of the next cycle of my inquiry. As a link between these two cycles of inquiry and to illustrate my engagement with this research literature I have included this review in chapter 8.

Red Thread 1

The Politics of My Inquiry

This is the first of four Red Threads through which I weave a political metaframe for my thesis. In it I turn to feminist debate about the politics of research claims concerning women's specific qualities as managers and leaders in organisations.

The purpose of my inquiry is to support feminist action towards greater equality in organisational contexts, by investigating the naming and addressing difficulties experienced between women. In the current political environment this involves risk. Findings on difficulties between women might be used to further undermine feminist initiatives or individual women in organisations.

In my approach to the interviews I attempted to steer a difficult path. In my framing of my questions and approach to analysis, I invited contributors to take part in dialogue on their experiences of women's interactions in organisational settings without assuming that these were gender specific. However my approach was primarily informed by research which identifies women specific attributes and asserts their positive value for managers and leaders in organisations.

In the closing stages of my inquiry it has become clearer to me that feminist collaboration between women has its own distinct character; research on attributes which women bring to business based leadership and management roles must therefore be read critically for its relevance to my inquiry.

My contributors were speaking from experience situated in a variety of different environments. All spoke of a range of strategies adopted by individual women in response to gendered power dynamics, and explored with me how these shaped their interactions with other women. All of them did without difficulty identify specific patterns in their interactions with women in work contexts and these had both generative and degenerative qualities. However they all resisted drawing general conclusions and asserted the specificity of their experience in relation to context and location.

All shared a commitment to asserting women's equality, and the equal value of women's contribution to organisations. All except B located their experience in a political environment in which women's collective action to achieve equality had made a significant impact, but in which resources and commitment to support further gender equalities initiatives were reduced. In this environment benefits to individual women were uneven. Many, but not all, of the dynamics they described concerned relationships between women who had experienced some form of reward or individual success, and those who were identified with equalities initiatives but who had not been individually rewarded. In this sense my contributors spoke from experience of a specific history of political initiative and commitment to women's equality, and could not be interpreted as speaking for 'women in general'.

Calas and Smircich develop a political critique of research associated with what they refer to as the 'feminine in management'. They ask 'what is the historical significance of recent discussions about 'women's ways of leading'? Do they really create new opportunities for women?' (Calas and Smircich 1993, p 71), and argue that these approaches simply re-state existing management practices under a different name. They assert that critical examination of the theoretical assumptions sustaining the notions of 'management' and 'leadership' (p. 72). They claim that one of the dangers of the 'feminine-in-management' position is to obscure the need for fundamental change that would alter the established balance of power, with a surface change that creates the illusion of a radical rethinking of what is. They assert that this is part of a pattern, the latest in a history of economic reasoning that values women out of instrumental necessity (p. 73).

> The feminine in management would help in converting 'diversity' into homogeneous team players under a caring motherly gaze.
> Calas and Smircich 1993: 75

Re-reading this article acted as a wake up call to me in the closing stages of my inquiry. In asking what *political* purpose the 'feminine-in-management' research may serve, I was reminded that the patterns I had identified were based on the experience and analysis of women in specific in their political, historical and organisational contexts. These women recognised the institutional structures of gender inequality, and had experience of strategies for addressing them through policy and practice in organisations. I recognised that I had been drawn into a more universalising frame through my own identification with attributes described in the management literature on gender difference and my interest in

psychoanalytic research and practice. This research spoke to my need for affirmation of these qualities in my professional practice.

Calas and Smircich do not reject claims for gender specific attributes, but rather assert the need to examine the political basis on which they are made. They refer to concerns about the cultural specificity and empirical basis of the research claims (p. 73). They then offer a different way of thinking 'feminine' which would bring a different set of images of 'women' into the global economy (p. 78). These images are firmly rooted in a global vision of social justice, equality and feminist values, countering consumerism with images of the 'frugal housewife' and 'female ingenuity'. Their vision includes an extended network of information through 'women's gossiping', and of the 'hysterical woman' who releases emotion to 'cry and scream in moral indignation for the crimes against humanity committed in the name of economic rationality' (p. 79).

The women who contributed to my inquiry, like myself, experience a double devaluation, as individual women and as women identified with work that is not longer considered necessary or priority. In this context the feminine-in-management research can serve a purpose in affirming qualities which are devalued in many organisational environments. As some feminist researchers have suggested, this might offer a basis for challenging narrowly definitions of 'leadership' and reframing them in order to affirm a range of different approaches and leadership qualities (Alvesson and Billing 1992). However this does not address the devaluing of gender equality interventions, and its undermining effects on the self-esteem of women and men who are their primary initiators.

Calas and Smircich's alternative images of 'the feminine' lead me to ask what alternative images of 'the feminine' my *feminist* inquiry generates. What images of how women enact *feminist* collaboration in *business* settings? What values did I and the women with whom I 'did' feminist consultancy enact as we tried to act on our political values, while attending to our respective needs to sustain ourselves within the organisational environments we had set out to change? How can, if at all, the universalising claims of the feminine-in-management and of psychodynamic research contribute to my inquiry?

Within my practice as a feminist consultant, business goals had to be held in uneasy tension with my feminist politics. While my inquiry was designed to support feminist collaboration, significant parts of it were enacted within the business relationships constructed by my consultancy contracts. Moving between political and business frames posed particular challenges, as I sought to develop an appropriate conceptual frame.

In the latter stages of my inquiry I became more aware of the politics of my inquiry subject, and of the choices open to me in developing my analysis. How could I refer to similarity of pattern which contributors had identified across differences of context and sector, without falling into universalising claims which I wished to avoid? How could I avoid implying such claims, as an unintended result of my intention to document the challenges of feminist collaboration and to develop successful ways of working with them?

At this point in my inquiry I resolved this dilemmas in two ways.

- I reaffirmed my initial motivation for embarking on this inquiry, to bring an under-researched area of women's experience of organisational life into the public arena, in order to sustain and promote feminist collaboration.
- I moved away from reading research on gender difference and into research on how women (and men) actively construct gender through interaction with each other (Gherardi 1996; van Bruinem). I took this concept of enacting gender into my inquiry about relationships between women and asked: 'how do women 'do' gender roles in relation to each other?' In chapter 8 I illustrate how I engaged with the literature to develop this approach.

In subsequent 'Red Threads ' I will continue to reflect on how I work with the tensions between business and political frames within my inquiry.

Chapter 7

In the Borderlands of Yearning and of Un/Belonging

Introduction

This chapter illustrates my use of action inquiry to sustain me through a crisis. I use the terms 'yearning' and 'un/belonging' to evoke a feeling state that cut across my personal and professional identities and relationships. Inquiry provided me with a means to move myself from the passive state related to this feeling of disconnection to a sense of agency from which I could initiate inquiry activities. In this sense there was symmetry between the inquiry subject, the inquiry process and outcomes.

I describe how through a range of inquiry activities I moved from a state of 'un/belonging', into a renewed sense of generative connectedness which I have called 'belonging'. I conceptualise this shift as taking place through practices associated with practical, experiential and propositional knowing. Through my inquiry I arrive at a different ontological and conceptual stance, offering potential for a more proactive set of strategies for sustaining myself as a freelance professional.

To illustrate this process I describe a slice of my action inquiry over a defined period of time. Through self-reflective practices I explored the relationship between my conceptual framing and my experience of qualities of connection and relationship, and developed practices to sustain agency through connection. I carried out a single cycle of discursive exchange with friends and colleagues and made a critical assessment of key concepts in attachment research as a basis for developing my sense-making frame. These activities are described as parallel and related inquiry tracks in the three sections of this chapter.

Written at a moment in which I was primarily identified with loss and separation, I have chosen to include this chapter in my thesis as it highlights my need as a consultant

engaged in radical practice to develop strategies for sustaining motivation through generative connection. Thus 'un/belonging' and 'yearning to belong' introduce a set of themes which surface in my case studies and which I theorise further in chapter 12.

This chapter marks a territory at the core of my inquiry pathway that is concerned with how to sustain feminist practitioners, and how to sustain feminist professional practice (chapter 4). In I present further cycles of this strand of my action inquiry, using the conceptual framework developed by attachment researchers as my starting point. I critically engage with this framework from a feminist standpoint.

Context and method

In this section I set the context for my inquiry, and briefly describe my method and inquiry activities.

Earlier this year (1999) my longing to belong re-surfaced strongly and dramatically in the form of its opposite, a profound feeling of 'un/belonging'. Following the ending of an intimate relationship I experienced a painful sense of disconnection and loss of agency. I sought to hold open the space that this opened up, using inquiry as a way of regaining some sense of agency in my personal and professional life. I had been introduced to relational psychoanalysis and attachment research within professional networks and drew from this literature both to make sense of my experience, and to reframe it.

I had set aside time during the summer months for writing other parts of my thesis (the analysis of interview scripts, chapter 6) but found myself too preoccupied to think about anything other than this. I decided to use this disruption as a way of initiating inquiry into how to sustain myself as a freelance consultant, and as an opportunity to critically appraise the conceptual tools related to attachment thinking which I had been using to think about this aspect of my professional practice. Opening the boundary between my life and my research led me into an inquiry track for which I had not planned, but which nevertheless proved fruitful (Marshall 1999). Through it I engaged with vulnerabilities that I would normally keep hidden from public view, allowing them to contribute to my understanding and conceptualisation of my consultancy practice and method.
Over a period of six weeks I tracked my movement in and out of a range of feeling states which I named a 'borderlands of un/belonging and yearning to belong': emptiness

and creativity, desolation and hope, apathy and energy, lack of purpose and glimmers of new possibilities. In the first of three parallel inquiry tracks, I used reflective practices to became more attuned to triggers associated with these feeling states. These are named in track 1 of the following section of this chapter. In a second inquiry track I invited friends to reflect on what 'belonging' meant to them. Through an initial round of seven one to one conversations I discovered that inquiry as a stance seemed to provide a medium for me to move from a felt need and desire to be 'rescued' by friends, into a desire to seek insight through sharing our different experiences as equals. This process is described in track 2 of the following section of this chapter.

As I engaged with my own thinking self through reflexive practices, the sense of pain associated with un/belonging faded. As I began to share my thinking with friends inner dialogue developed, and with it new thinking about conceptual frames for understanding the variety of experiences and needs associated with 'belonging'. This process generated a sense of renewed connection that I associated with belonging within new and existing relationships; and with it a renewed sense of agency: a sense of myself as a proactive, and initiating subject. From writing to survive in response to an unwanted affective state I had moved into writing with a sense of creativity, of excitement, and of purpose. I drew from feminist research literature to explore this new sense of self and of connected knowing (Belenky et al 1986).

In a third inquiry track, I considered the conceptual frames I was using to understand my process and which were relevant to my work. I discovered that the attachment concepts I was using were embedded in a friendship that had been central to my recovery from previous loss. In my third inquiry track I move from recognition of my attachment to these concepts in the context of a specific relationship to a more critical appreciation of them.

In chapter 2 I introduced the extended epistemology of co-operative inquiry (Heron 1988; Reason 1988). In tracks 1 and 2 of this inquiry I engaged critically with experiential and practical knowing, in the third with propositional knowing. My inquiry was multi-levelled, and self-directed. It enabled me to achieve a shift in ontological stance that mirrored the conceptual shift achieved.

Inquiry tracks 1 and 2

Generating connection through action inquiry

Track 1
Self-reflective practices: tracking agency and connection

In this track my inquiry practices focused on practical and experiential knowing. I drew from journal entries to describe how I developed and used a range of practical interventions to recover a sense of agency through practical initiatives taken on my own and in interaction with others. Through inquiry I sustained a sense of generative connection which seemed associated with a stronger sense of myself as an active, inquiring subject. In the following I describe my inquiry activities as a series of separate initiatives, overlapping in time.

Step 1: Developing critical consciousness

- Observing myself waking in the mornings gripped with terror, spiralling downwards: 'I can't do this research: its too lonely, its worthless, I'm worthless, my life is worthless, no one wants to know me, if they did I would not be alone like this, without a lover/partner/job etc. Then: is this really me? How can I have ended up alone, without purpose or direction?
- Sharing this script with two friends, and discovering that despite our differences, all three of us wake with a script with the same degenerative structure.
- Considering our choices for interpreting this state of mind: part of the grieving process following separation; menopausal mood swing; dysfunctional pattern originating in childhood; internalised oppression: homophobia, misogyny, patriarchal family values; isolation and lack of community; as a result of the Thatcher years of promoting individualism, and so on.
- Becoming aware of practical solutions implied by political, psychodynamic, and health-related conceptual frames and selecting those that strengthened my sense of agency.
- Observing my use of cultural or political representations to affirm or undermine my sense of self worth as a single and recently separated lesbian and developing critical appraisal of media representations of success or happiness in relation to my life and identity. Moving from 'using' negative representation to confirm a

negative self-state to actively seeking affirming representations.

Step 2: Developing agency and connection

I initiated practical interventions designed to affirm my sense of agency and observed which of these practices and patterns of interaction confirmed or challenged my self-sense. I discovered that my capacity to initiate and think creatively was linked to a quality of association through interaction, and to physical activity. I considered the quality of my interactions, and recorded affective states associated with them. Through experimentation I established patterns which affirmed reciprocity and invited inquiry rather than problem solving interaction. This affirmed my sense of agency and connection, and reduced the painful affects associated with loss.

Practical examples included:

- Connecting through the medium of inquiry:
  - Being present to friends in inquiry mode: 'This is how I'm feeling, isn't it interesting!' and inviting a response based on reciprocal sharing. Enjoying connection through shared activities. Initiating new connections – gaining a new sense of myself as valued, of interest, able to interact creatively with new people in new situations
  - Noticing moments of mutual connection where re-framing of negative self-state took place and a sense of agency was renewed and sustained.
- Shifting anxiety through physical activity:
  - Running, swimming, Tai Chi; I found that physical exercise with others often had a similar effect to 'now ' moments; renewing a sense of agency and of being in community; shifting the sense of paralysis that comes with anxiety to a renewed sense of 'I can'. Doing this meant trusting that activity would change my state of mind and being open to the change
- Generating renewed purpose through managing task and environment
  - Choosing do-able activities to create a sense of being purposeful in interaction with others
  - Finding ways of using environment to reduce anxiety and regenerate purpose and agency; moving between public and private spaces
- Creating opportunities for professional collaboration and connection
  - Proposing joint ventures to break isolation
- Sharing process as inquiry:
  - Naming this inquiry process and sharing it as inquiry data with colleagues and

students (on 'Values, Learning and Inquiry, the MSc module I teach at Bristol University). Noticing that this generated positive feedback about the 'live' quality of the session and a wider dialogue about conceptual framing

Each of these practices involved awareness of and resistance to a pull towards identifying with negative self-images rooted in experiencing loss of relationship as failure, associated feelings of shame, and a tendency to resort to ways of understanding my feeling state as pathology. I was reminded that lesbian feminist research identifies similar experiences as widely shared examples of internalised oppression (Bunch 1995; Lorde 1984; Reinfelder 1996). In inquiry tracks 2 and 3 I illustrate use of feminist friendship and lesbian standpoint to construct an alternative inquiry stance.

Through these practices of self-challenge I moved myself on a daily basis from degenerative to generative states of being. They enabled me to maintain a stance of action inquiry, from which I could engage in reflective practices. I think of this as 'creating a secure base for myself', a position from which I had the necessary sense of solidity and security to move through my feeling states and begin to take up a stance as inquirer.

Step 3: Sustaining connection

I discovered that the experience of being with others did not in itself establish the sense of generative connection that I needed to sustain my own agency; I needed to observe more closely how I was interpreting my experiences. In the following extract from my journal I describe this process:

> *During the last week when I have been sensitive to my own need for belonging I have observed moments when I have felt its absence, moments when I have sought it, moments when I have found or re-created it.*
>
> *I notice myself needing a boost of connection each day, finding it in interaction with friends, from each of whom I get a feeling of being cared for, loved - yet continuing to experience this as second best.*
>
> *I check with friends who remind me that partners do not necessarily share interests, that friendship is equally important, that sense of purpose has to come from oneself, and cannot be provided externally. I realise I was holding in mind an idealised representation of partnership as a secure base - to which nothing else could*

measure up. I am learning to view this representation as desire rather than necessity for my well-being.

The media are full of solutions to unhappiness and insecurity that bear no relation to the reality of my life as a single lesbian. I felt pulled towards these as explanation for my sense of un/belonging. I turn to feminist writings and recognise the importance of shared values and standpoint, in order to hold onto the value and to foreground friendship between women (Faderman 1985; Harding 1991; Raymond 1986).

I talk to feminist friends with whom I have shared history and core values. Although their situation may be different we have a common language and shared referents. We compare strategies and encourage each other. I feel recognised and validated - as if this is my secure base - for as long as I stay within our shared parameters.
Journal entries, August 1999

The experience of self-affirmation through conversation with feminist friends, albeit conditional and often reliant on political consensus, reminded me of the need to consider the politics of attachment. Political stance and values do play a part in both sense making and generating a sense of belonging; 'secure base' and 'belonging' are among many possible key words that describe a cluster of experiences of desire to be 'inside' and of feeling 'on the outside'. I decided to continue to use these concepts while becoming more alert to the other possibilities, and began to critically appraise the concepts drawn from attachment research that I had been using to make sense of my experience.[1]

I began to hold less tightly to the idea of being 'without' belonging and to notice the many sources of belonging in my life: friendships, the voluntary group of which I am an active member, the organisations for which I work, the projects I have created and to which I consult. and my family relationships. In all of these I recognised significant relationships, structured by close working collaborations and shared history, beliefs, objectives and tasks. Focusing on these relationships,

a feeling of association began to suffuse and change my self-sense. The feeling of aloneness moved from foreground to background. I began to take up the threads of purpose in my life again, and to weave a new sense of myself. I re-framed the meaning I had invested in 'being single' from 'being alone' to being at the centre of a web of relationships that I had co-created and sustained. It was as if I had turned the lens of a kaleidoscope, or replaced one coloured lens with another. Keeping the kaleidoscope focused required sustaining activities.

I used concepts drawn from attachment thinking, in particular the 'mourning cycle'[1] and narrative as a means of updating 'internal working models' to understand my own process of coming to terms with loss, and of how this might contribute to understanding my inquiry process. I return to this discussion in track 3 below.

Transformation through moments of meeting

Through my inquiry I became aware of qualitative shifts in my self-sense, in interactions with friends and in consultancy/client relationships. These shifts seemed to signal a quality of interaction, a sense of 'exchange' between us.

I recognised something of the quality of this 'exchange' in accounts by relational psychologists researching pivotal 'moments' in client / analyst communication (Beebe 1998; Stern 1998; Tronick 1998). In 'moments of meeting' client and analyst attune to each other, and share a state of awareness. At this moment there is potential for a shift in consciousness through mutual interaction, leading to new, shared insight (Stern 1998). These shifts are concerned with the organisation of consciousness rather than with propositional knowledge.

I introduced these concepts to my students during a teaching session on transfer of learning. In a supervision session one of my students, to whom I described this research, stated that she recognised these moments in our one to one interactions, and in my teaching sessions. She illustrated this by referring to a specific incident during a teaching session. At a particular point in this session students had become unresponsive, and my energy dropped. I had checked my inclination to press on with what I had planned, interrupted the process, and invited students to get up and discuss among themselves what was happening in the room. An excited buzz of animated discussion followed. In her feedback my student stated that this interaction had brought about a qualitative shift for herself and other students. They felt I had recognised and acted on their state of mind,

and this had enabled them to make connections between their felt experience and the concepts we were discussing. I recognised a similar strengthened sense of agency and connection in my own experience of this moment. In the research to which I refer this might be termed a 'moment of recognition', a now moment' which followed a 'moment of meeting' in our 'intersubjective field' (Lyons - Ruth 1998; Stern 1998).

In my analysis of interactions with clients and colleagues and in my interviews I described shifts in consciousness which took place during and as a result of some of our inquiry-based discussions (chapters 4, 6). The research makes the link between moments of meeting and a new sense of agency generated through mutual recognition (Lyons Ruth 1998). The concept of 'moments of meeting' has similarities with Buber's dialogical theory of knowledge; in his 'I/Thou' relationship, healing occurs through 'meeting' rather than through insight and analysis (Buber 1965, p. 12, quoted in Beebe, p.335). In my second case study I illustrate how healing occurred through a moment of mutual recognition within my consultancy (chapter 10).

The following examples convey something of the quality of my 'moments of meeting' with friends. The content of our discussions is described in track 2. The examples below are offered as snapshots of 'moments' within a dynamic process, not as idealised stable states:

- Sharing with H the feeling of un/belonging, and listening to her engage with the question I put to her, exploring together, each bringing experience that seemed to relate to the theme. At a certain moment, experiencing release through a sense of my state of mind being accepted, received as offering insight to a shared condition, not evidence of failure.
- Acting as advisor to G when she bought a camera yesterday and in response to appreciation she expressed gaining a sense of myself as giving, not just receiving; staying for dinner afterwards and relaxing together. At a certain moment, feeling and seeing evidence of being welcomed and loved; loving and included. In this context, feeling enabled to invite joint exploration of states of 'belonging'.
- Being with W and C at the Barbican on an outing that I had arranged. At a certain moment making them laugh, feeling they had enjoyed being with me and feeling shared affection; breaking a pattern of presenting myself as being 'in crisis' and in need of rescuing.

In each 'moment of meeting' I experienced a qualitative shift in the basis of connection, a shift from feeling only able to receive to a sense of my own capacity for reciprocity and mutuality. I thought of this as a shift in 'implicit relational mode'. This concept, which I introduced in my analysis of the quality of interaction between myself and my discussants in chapter 6, was developed by relational psychologists to refer to the quality of the experience of relationship enacted between adult caregivers and children, and between therapists and their clients (Lyons-Ruth 1998).

This shift took place and was expressed though patterns of activity and interaction, in which I positioned myself and was responded to as 'giving' as well as 'taking'. It took place on two levels: in my inner and intersubjective worlds. In my inner world I enacted this shift when I took up an inquiry position in relation to my state of mind and was able to name and present an account of my experience to others. In my intersubjective I enacted a shift in relation to others when I was able to invite them to engage with me in inquiry. Through this process I challenged my internalised self-image as 'failing' and took up a position of inquiry which was based on and released a sense of agency.

The qualities associated with these interactions correspond closely to attachment researchers' accounts of 'secure attachment behaviour' that I describe in track 3 below. These were: feeling mutually cared for, loved, supported; giving and receiving; playfulness; feeling permission to be vulnerable; feeling confident that boundaries will be respected. In each case, the interaction generated inspiration and motivation to work, to write, to be creative and in inquiry mode.

During the same period of time I also experienced moments where professional or friendship connections were abused, triggering self-doubt and undermining agency. Examples were:

- A dispute with a client with whom I thought I had an amicable working alliance, calling into question my understanding of the basis of our working relationship[2].
- Repeated encroachments on agreed my time boundaries by colleagues.
- An expectation that I continue to work for a client despite late payments.

In each of these interactions I experienced expectations that I would sustain connection at the expense of my own needs. This undermined my sense of self-worth and ability to work creatively. I learned to make counter assertions, and in doing so regained a sense of agency without necessarily gaining agreement.

During the period of this inquiry I became increasingly sensitised to movement back and forth between these states. I discovered that belonging or not belonging was not static, but a dynamic field. Each had generative and degenerative qualities; sometimes 'belonging' could be at the expense of mutuality or reciprocity, or based on collusion with denial of an aspect of self. These states of being were not mutually exclusive; I could be catapulted or move myself from one state to another by changing the focus of my awareness or activity. I gained a sense of my ability to alter the quality and nature of my responses to events. The key seemed to be to identify triggers of states of generative belonging/not belonging and pathways I could access for moving between them. This process involved re-framing at affective as well as cognitive levels. By developing a meta-analysis I stepped outside my previous conceptual frame and took up a different stance in relation to my lived experience (Marshall 1999;Torbert 1991). From this position I was able to develop a new conceptual position.

Towards the end of this period I mobilised these findings and skills to make an intervention at a group relations event on 'social inclusion'. At a moment when a homophobic phrase catapulted me from a internal sense of belonging to 'un/belonging' I was able to over ride my impulse to withdraw. Instead I described this moment of experience to participants and framed my account as a contribution to inquiry into what triggered shifts between the experiential states associated with inclusion and exclusion. This was acknowledged as a powerful intervention and subsequent discussion contributed substantial material to the event. I felt that I had been instrumental in creating conditions for self-inclusion through the way I had framed my contribution as an invitation to dialogue, and that I had combined this with a positive assertion of my values and identity.

Track 2
Signposts to belonging

In parallel to the reflective practices described in Track 1 above, I shared my findings with friends and invited them to respond from their own experience. I was increasingly aware that my use of the term 'belonging' was short hand for a complex set of experiences. I decided to continue to use it as a metaphor despite its ambiguity, as long as it held meaning for me and my discussants.

Each of my discussants was employed in a professional role. All except one was

associated with a specific organisation, of which two were founder members. In six separate conversations I asked whether belonging was important to them, and if so how where they found it. In their responses each confirmed it as an important and desirable quality. Three out of five referred to family resemblance or shared values and history in a family context. One who was self-employed specifically asserted her ethnic and national identity as a primary source of belonging. All except the latter referred to their work relationships as a primary site, however this work-based belonging could not be guaranteed and was dependent on power, influence, and struggle to sustain value-based practice:

> *From my professional association – I have made myself so powerful in it that I feel I belong – it expresses my values.*
>
> Self-employed therapist

From the group practice I have created, where I have long term relationships with practice members who are my colleagues.

> Manager, therapy group practice

It was based on a sense of being valued which had to be worked for and could not be guaranteed:

Belonging is linked to the need for recognition; at the end of 10 years I was only just beginning to get it.

> Local government equalities officer

Frequently it came from teamwork, supporting each other in adversity; but this could be undermined by organisational arrangements such as performance-related pay or managerial roles:

> There is a feeling of being in it together- but this is now under attack as performance related pay has just been introduced.

Legal advisor

To summarise, discussants' examples conveyed an impression of belonging as desirable but precarious. It was described as a quality of relationship that had to be worked for and maintained. It was subject to context and could be undermined or even destroyed by unfavourable environments, or shifting power relationships within organisations.

Further discussions led us to the conclusion that social representation of identity, including gender, sexuality, race and our place in social and organisational structures, also shape our sense of potential and self worth, and that these in turn shape our approach to making belonging. I develop this theme in my reflections on attachment research in the next section.

Tracks 1 and 2
Conclusions

Reflection on my inquiry findings confirmed my earlier conclusions that the sense of belonging to which I aspired is achieved in moments, through an active process; it is not an end state. It is relational and not the same as membership. It is a state of mind, a quality of connection based on mutual perception of acceptance in the context of relationship. In this sense it has to be constantly re-created; it can be yearned for, but cannot be guaranteed. As a condition for inquiry, a sense of belonging can be generative or degenerative, stifling or providing a secure base from which to explore and make new meaning. It has similarities with the qualities associated by attachment researchers with secure or insecure attachment; or by feminist researchers with positive or negative effects of community. I will explore this in the following section.

In writing these sections I recognised similar patterns of interaction to those explored in my interview discussions (chapter 6). These concerned tensions between connection based on merging and connection within which I maintained a sense of separate identity. Feminist research that explored these tensions linked these strategies to women's different ways of knowing (Belenky 1986).

In 'connected knowing' the self is used as an instrument for understanding the other, and employs empathy to 'feel into' the other person while maintaining focus on her uniqueness. Connected knowing can also be a means to come to know the self, paying attention to inner experience, and taking an active stance in relation to thoughts and feelings (Field, 1936/81, quoted in Clinchy p.229). Connected knowing is:

> *A rigorous, deliberate and demanding procedure, a way of knowing that requires work* (Clinchy, p. 209).

However when a sense of the other person as a separate being is lost, and merging

takes place, dialogue breaks down and connection can become degenerative. In the following section I draw from research on separated and merged attachment to conceptualise this dynamic. In later cycles of inquiry, I will draw from relational psychodynamic research to conceptualise this dynamic further (chapter 12).

Inquiry track 3
Attachment as a conceptual frame

Introduction

This inquiry began with a state of being which I called 'un/belonging'. I have suggested that this sense of un/belonging was relational; that a sense of belonging had to be proactively worked for and maintained rather than given. I suggested that a feminist approach to attachment research might provide a useful conceptual frame for understanding these processes.

In this third cycle of my action inquiry I consider some of the conceptual tools developed within attachment thinking. From a feminist standpoint I critically reflect on whether these provided an appropriate propositional frame for this part of my inquiry. I was aware that there is considerable a body of literature relevant to this subject within disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, politics, and psychology. Interdisciplinary studies such as cultural studies, anti-racist, feminist, lesbian and gay and anti-disablist literatures explore how political movements had addressed the politics of 'belonging'. It is beyond the scope of this inquiry to embark on a full review of literature relevant to this subject. I offer this section to demonstrate how I engaged critically with concepts that were embedded in my practice before my inquiry began, and that played a significant part throughout my inquiry.

Feminist standpoint on belonging

Feminist writing - and in particular black feminist writing - has identified 'belonging' as a mixed blessing. Those who are on the margins may experience a pull towards the appearance of belonging, represented by the life style of those who inhabit the mainstream (hooks 1990). External forms of relationship may be mistaken for the quality of belonging with which they are associated in cultural representations. This distinction

between desire and representations of its fulfilment opens a space for the experience of 'yearning' as potential for radical possibility (hooks 1984), rather than as evidence of deficit. As I discovered in my inquiry, when experiencing loss it is easy to confuse external representation of relationships with the reality, to allow desire for belonging to lead to idealised perception, and to forget that 'belonging' cannot be guaranteed.

Black feminist political writing asserts the need for locations from which to affirm and to nurture subjectivity:

> *That space in the margin which is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonised/ coloniser.*
> Hooks 1990:152

However sites of affirmation of belonging based on shared identity become degenerative when confused with sites of radical coalition that require working together across different identities (Reagon 1983). In this case sophisticated skills are needed for building sufficient common ground to sustain coalition work, without compromising identity, political stance or beliefs (Albrecht and Brewer 1990). These skills have been developed and named 'transversal politics' by feminists working across ethnic, national and religious divides (Cockburn 1998, 1999; Yuval-Davis1997, 1999).
But what of feminists working as change agents in organisations whose values they do not share? Where are the sites of 'creativity and power' to nurture the subjectivity of feminist consultants? These dilemmas are in part addressed through the notion of 'tempered radical', a term which refers to individuals who are committed to their organisations and also to a cause, community or ideology which may be at odds with the dominant culture of their organisation (Meyerson and Scully 1995). Tempered radicals must maintain their role as boundary crossers, able to maintain affiliation with both outside and inside; from this position belonging is a dangerous luxury that must be foregone. Maintaining ambivalence becomes the key to resisting co-option by the organisation, and ties with like-minded people outside are a source of sustenance. Affiliations are expressed through language, but shared language may rule out other forms of talk, thought or identity (1995: 592). Affiliation can keep passion alive but also presents challenges with ambivalent identity:

> *Perhaps a tempered radical can never go home to one community and identity or another; tempered radicals are often lonely.*
> 1995:591

In the previous cycles of inquiry contributors to interview discussions suggested that ambivalence presented challenges for maintaining trust within relationships of affiliation and coalition. In the case studies that follow I explore how these issues arose for me in my consultancy role and relationships (chapters 9 -11) and in chapter 12 I conceptualise these issues further.

The feeling of 'un/belonging' which was my starting point in this chapter both signposted my need for 'home base' and challenged my conception of its possibility. Towards the end of this inquiry track I began to identify more strongly with 'yearning' as a generative state of being (hooks 1991) and to link this to early feminist research on representations of women's desire (Coward 1984). Feminist writing I have cited is concerned with addressing the desire and the needs associated with 'yearning' to 'belong' from a political perspective which calls into question the ways in which desire is defined and the assumptions that desires can be fulfilled. Attachment research and relational psychology are concerned with the associated psychodynamic.

Lesbian feminist standpoint

Feminist standpoint theory suggests that analyses from the perspective of lesbian lives contribute insights not visible from within heterosexual culture (Harding 1991: 253). Several of these insights relate to findings of the first two tracks of this inquiry and to core themes of this thesis. The first of these is that from a lesbian standpoint one sees women in relation to other women - or at least not only in relation to men and family (1991: 253). Harding quotes Zimmerman who argues that 'lesbians brought female bonding to the centre of feminist discourse, and now most feminists see women in relation to other women' (Zimmerman 1991). From this perspective she argues that women's valuing of each other and loving and caring relationships become more visible as a bedrock for social activism for women (Aptheker 1989 p. 93, cited by Harding 1991, p. 257); the lives and social contribution of single women assume a value lacking in heterosexual culture:

> *Looking at the world from the perspective of many lesbians' lives today brings into sharp relief the pains, pleasures, and achievements of single women's lives.* (Harding 1991)

I drew from this standpoint to sustain the sense of generative connection that I had experienced and to engage critically with the conceptual lens I had been using. This lens offered an affirming propositional and political frame for my experience of separation from my female partner, from which I was able to critically engage with the attachment lens from which I had drawn to make sense of my experience of loss.

The Attachment Lens

Key concepts drawn from attachment research had been part of my sense making framework for several years before I began this inquiry. I had co-facilitated a training group for the Centre for Attachment Based Psychodynamic Psychotherapy for a year. During this time my co-facilitator and I explored uses of attachment concepts within our group facilitation. I had also, with encouragement from my friends and colleagues at the Centre, used these concepts to make sense of significant experiences of loss in my personal relationships. My use of attachment concepts had taken on a meaning from these living relationships, and from the practice and research produced by my colleagues (Southgate 1996; 2001).

Further, it felt to me as if our way of relating in some sense modelled attachment as an active process rather than a state of being which is 'given' (Heard and Lake 1997). As part of my inquiry we drew from their research to conceptualise our interactions as ways of 'doing attachment'. In this research intersubjective relationships are conceptualised as taking place within an attachment space, which may take a variety of different forms of secure or insecure attachment. The quality of this space determines capacity for generative or degenerative relationships (Southgate 1996). We arrived at a description that suggested that within the attachment space created through our relationship we shared and made sense of current concerns, testing the concepts we were using and creating new thinking. As in my inquiry track 2, doing inquiry created a particular quality of connection, which combined acceptance of separateness with belonging.

Through engaging with the attachment research literature I set out to explore whether 'attachment ' adequately described the quality of connection that generated 'belonging' and agency in my inquiry.

Attachment theory was first developed by Bowlby (1988) in the post war period (Holmes 1993). His research demonstrated traumatic effects for small children of separation from their caregivers during hospital stays and in their experiences of evacuation. It resulted in changed practices in childcare and was used to justify social policies designed to keep

women with young children at home and out of the employment. As a result his work is associated with anti-feminist measures to shore up traditional gender roles; the emphasis he gave to the need for support to caregivers has been lost.

Attachment researchers assert that 'secure attachment' is a fundamental human need (Ainsworth 1982; Bowlby 1988; Maine 1999). Key concerns are the development of our capacity to form and to sustain satisfactory relationships. These capacities are said to be central to the health and well being of humans - and indeed other species - throughout the life span; they relate to our ability to function in the full range of our roles as caregivers dependants in family, professional, community, and public lives.

Current research is mainly concerned with clinical applications, and is only beginning to acknowledge that development and use of these capacities are shaped by political and social relationships (de Zulueta 1993; Kraemer and Roberts J. 1996; Marris 1996). Feminist critiques criticise the attachment frame for idealising the relationship between mother and child, and point out that Bowlby's theory has been used against women who challenge traditional motherhood (Burman 1994). Bowlby's research did claim that children needed a consistent attachment figure; due to the prevailing sociocultural and political culture at the time this was taken to mean mothers staying at home. Further research however demonstrated that the attachment figure did not have to be the mother but could be another person or a group of people.

Many of the concepts of attachment theory do resonate strongly with my felt experience. In this inquiry track I have mapped and critiqued these concepts and my use of them.

Key concepts in attachment theory

The 'secure base' is a key concept in attachment thinking. It was developed to describe the bond between young children and their caregivers (Ainsworth 1982, Bowlby 1979) but also refers to qualities sought by adults in their intimate relationships (Bowlby 1988; Heard and Lake 1997; Holmes 1993). Secure base is a particular kind of attachment space; it describes the 'ambience created by the attachment figure for the attached person' when this provides safety and security, and offers a springboard for curiosity and exploration (Ainsworth 1982, Holmes 1993). In this sense it is similar to the feminist concepts of 'home base' (Reagon 1983) and of locations for nurturing subjectivity (hooks 1991). Home base is a space for nurturing and affinity where the emphasis is on shared values and empathy; it as a safe space to go out from. However it cannot replace the

necessity of forging political alliances in which political differences have to be addressed and common ground built. The concept acknowledged the special skills and challenges associated with working in alliance, as well as the need for a sense of nurturing based on shared identity and/or politics. Similarly, black feminists have asserted their need for spaces that nurture subjectivity through affirming their culture and identity (hooks 1991).

The concept of 'secure base' has served as an important metaphor for me to express what I have lacked in times of felt insecurity. I used it during this inquiry as a referent to the positive aspects of the relationship I had lost and to qualities for which I was seeking. Within my consultancy I used it to refer to qualities which I sought to offer and which I hoped to receive from colleagues or peers. Through my inquiry, I have come to understand secure base as something to be co-created, a dynamic concept rather than a stable condition that could be 'found' or 'provided'. As in attachment research, I use it to signal a state of inner being created through reciprocal interaction between two subjects (Rutter 1981). This insight and shift in stance from a quest to find a secure base to acceptance that a secure base has to be made and maintained in a relational context, is similar to the shift to which some of the contributors to my interviews referred in different ways. Contributor C for example described how she worked to shift her clients expectations that she nurture them, and her own habitual nurturing response, in order to enable them to develop their own leadership qualities. I explored a similar dynamic in an interaction with F and in my case studies will explore this dynamic further in relation to colleagues and clients.

Attachment researchers make a fundamental distinction between 'secure' and 'anxious' attachment, and see the latter as the precursor of developmental difficulty. Bowlby understood in/secure attachment to be a result of patterns of interaction of the child with her caregivers. Patterns characterised by a care giver who is responsive and has the capacity for attunement and 'secure holding', are associated with children who have capacities for self-reflection, and ability to make meaning through narrative of her experience (Holmes 1993). These interactions, and the meaning made of them by the recipient of care, are summarised in 'internal working models', templates of relationship which are formative throughout adult life. However while early years and environment are formative, they are not definitive. The adult capacity to change and shape the quality of our attachments is central.

The concept of 'moments of meeting' provides one mechanism for 'updating' internal

working models of attachment, through reciprocal interaction. In my inquiry tracks 1 and 2 I identified shifts in patterns of relationship and in consciousness which I associated with a greater sense of agency. In a later chapter I turn to feminist relational psychoanalysis to develop this discussion within my consultancy practice (chapter 12).

The focus on narrative in attachment research opens up ground for a range of developmental and organisational interventions concerned with enabling people to come to terms with change in personal, institutional and organisational settings. Agency is asserted and preserved through capacity to make meaning, in the development of new narrative, in the most challenging of circumstance. While internal working models play a part in shaping narrative, they can in turn be shaped. Research into how adults construct new narratives in ways which challenge and 'update' mental models contributes to understanding developmental shifts. These concepts offer scope for working in depth using autobiographical awareness and action inquiry (Marshall 1999; Torbert 1991).

Gendering Attachment

Women have traditionally been seen as the primary source of secure attachment, as mothers, as lovers, sisters, daughters, colleagues, friends and wives. Feminist writings have exposed the extent of hidden care that women provide – in the home and in local communities - and its still unacknowledged economic and social value (Campbell 1996). Feminist organisation research suggests that women managers and leaders in organisations are still widely expected to provide for attachment needs from within traditionally defined roles as nurturers (Graves Dumas 1985; Wajman 1998). Women, however, are less likely to receive the quality of care that they are expected to give either in the home or in organisations where they work (Campbell 1996).

The need for a secure base is likely to be felt particularly acutely by those whose subjectivity and identity is not represented positively in predominant cultures. Images of financial, domestic or other forms of security may feed a sense of inadequacy for those who do not have access to them or the resources to protect them from the material effects of economic uncertainty (Marris 1996). The desire for refuge from uncertainty may be experienced as a deep yearning for 'home base', for a location of belonging - a yearning that may prove dangerous if confused with an actual location, rather than a quality of interaction. As I show in my third case study women in positions of power are often the recipients of these longings (chapter 12).

A feminist approach to attachment research would move away from generic and universalising references to 'secure attachment' and focus on the variety of social, organisational and domestic relationships within which women and men offer and find an attachment base. Comparative research identifies culture and gender difference in attachment patterns (de Zulueta 1993). An attachment lens could contribute to understanding of expectations expressed by men and women towards of women managers in organisations.

Some practitioners draw from attachment theory to make a case for designing organisational environments to sustain secure attachment behaviours within peer relationships, leadership and management practices (Byng-Hall 1995). Policy makers and politicians are beginning to draw from attachment research to advocate social responsibility for addressing these questions (Kraemer and Roberts 1996). However with few exceptions this research rarely addresses the gender politics of attachment (Campbell 1996).

Attachment concepts used creatively and with political judgement may be useful in lending authority to interventions designed to promote more recognition of women's needs for affirmation as autonomous, creative and inter-dependent human beings. They might help in sustaining spaces of radical openness, within which women and men might nurture and regenerate each other (hooks 1991). Interventions would need to address, validate and sustain the variety of life-enhancing connections and relationships created by women in relation to women and to men, and the ways these are represented symbolically. Feminist organisation consultants and researchers have a role to play here and may themselves find attachment concepts useful, as I have done, to more adequately sustain themselves.

Conclusion

I have established through this inquiry into 'un/belonging and yearning' that there is a correlation between my ability to do creative work and my need for a positive self-sense that is rooted and sustained in generative connection. This correlation resonates with attachment theory's concept of secure base, of attachment space, which is created and sustained in inter-subjective spaces. However it also resonates with feminist research into women's need for a 'home base' and black women's need for spaces for 'nurturing

subjectivity'.

Attachment takes many forms, some of which are constantly eroded by negative images, social and organisational practices and policies. I have used this inquiry to identify and develop practices which sustained a generative sense of connection, which I have called belonging. These issues are at the core of my professional and personal well being and must therefore be at the centre of my inquiry.

In the case studies that follow I explore how this 'yearning' was enacted in my consultancy relationships, with generative and degenerative effects, and how women's need for affirmation was enacted between women in the mainstream and on the margins. In this chapter I have referred to feminist research into women's connected knowing (Belenky 1986; Clinchy 1996) to conceptualise ways of knowing the other within intersubjective relationships. In the chapters that follow I draw from feminist relational theory to conceptualise the intersubjective dynamics between women within my consultancy projects.

---

[1] The concept of 'mourning cycle' was developed to describe the process of grieving in response to bereavement. It is conceived of as a process of recovery to loss, a repair cycle for broken attachment. It could apply to recovery from loss associated with any kind of trauma or change (Bowlby/Southgate in Southgate 1996).
2 The issues arising from this dispute are the subject of my inquiry in Case Study 1, Chapter 10

Chapter 8

From Gender Difference to Gender Dialogue?

Introduction

This chapter illustrates a turning point in my overall inquiry. In it I show how I engaged with research literature at a point where I made a radical shift in my understanding of the construction of gendered power and inequality in organisations.

In the closing stages of writing my thesis, my supervisor encouraged me to make more explicit reference to literature reviews I had written during my inquiry. While these reviews had been formative in the development of my consultancy practice, I had not illustrated this within my case studies. This chapter addresses this gap in my account of my inquiry process, and is intended to illustrate the quality and breadth of my engagement with research literature on women and gender in management. In my case studies I will show how this informed my consultancy practice (chapters 9 -11).

In constructing this chapter three years later, I selected writings that had an important influence on my practice. I added an introduction, conclusions and commentary on their place in my overall inquiry.

The chapter is in two parts and based on two separate literature reviews, written during December 1997/January 1998, and August 1998.

In Part 1 I engage with four research texts that offered me new ways of conceptualising how gendered power was constructed and enacted in organisational contexts. They are concerned with how individuals enact gender within their interactions, and with how gender divisions are structured and reproduced through language and epistemology, as well as through social and institutional structures and practices. I reflect on key ideas from these texts and indicate how I might draw from them within my consultancy practice.

In Part 2 I introduce the literature review I carried out for the research described in my first case study (chapter 9). This review summarises my reflections on the women in management literature over the previous two years. Its purpose was to draw from this research to affirm the specific skills and attributes of women managers in the refugee sector, and on this basis to encourage dialogue about leadership between women and men in the sector

In my conclusions I reflect on the significance of this conceptual work in the context of my overall inquiry.

To assist my readers I have used formatting to distinguish between these texts and the time frames in which they were written. The literature reviews that form the basis of the chapter and were written at an earlier point in my inquiry to the introduction, subsequent reflections and conclusions to this chapter, are in a different font and indented with a line down their right margin. References to chapters written after the literature reviews are added in [square brackets]. The introduction, conclusion and subsequent reflections have no line at their margins and are not indented.

Part 1

CARPP WRITING DECEMBER 1997/JANUARY 1998

This is a reflection on four texts that introduced me to different ways of conceptualising and framing core issues that have emerged within my inquiry into life process and professional practice. In what follows I summarise the key concepts and ideas that strike me as important, and then reflect on them in relation to my thinking and practice. In this process I am attempting to enter into a dialogue with the texts from my position as consultant and as inquirer. The texts are:

1. Ingrid Ljungberg van Bruinum *'Getting a Glimpse of the Otherness of the Other; men and women in dialogue* ' [publisher unknown, year circa 1997]
2. Collette Oseen *'Luce Irigaray, sexual difference and theorising leaders and leadership'* in Gender Work and Organisation, vol. 4 no. 3 July 1997
3. Carlene Boucher *How Women Socially Construct Leadership using Organisations: a study using memory work, in* Gender Work and Organisation, vol. 4 no 3 July 1997
4. Silvia Gherardi (1995) *Gender, Symbolism and Organisational Cultures* Sage: London

TEXT 1

Ingrid Ljungberg van Bruinum

Getting a Glimpse of the Otherness of the Other; men and women in dialogue

This writing intrigued me because of its focus on seeing the 'otherness of the other'. It's an important piece for me both because of its key concepts and methodology and because it is an account of an action research consultancy intervention using a dialogue-based methodology. i.e. both the method and the key concepts are intriguing.

Methodology

The aim was to open up dialogue between men and women about how each viewed the other. Although in the original design ILvB intends to ask how women view women, and how men view men, this disappears from the frame as it is she implies, (p. 47) absent from the material she analyses.

Ordinary men and women talked in a formative as well as a representative manner keeping perspectives open and attempting to 'create a shared world'. They showed 'knowledge in action' and demonstrated a wish for relational engagement:

> In order to take some steps in reducing the inequality between men and women the *relationship between women and men should be the starting point, both conceptually and operationally,* and we should *open the actual and potential institutional spaces for dialogue* [my italics] (p.68).

Key concepts

- Relational: the subordination of women is a relational issue that can only be addressed in a relational manner.
- Women and men are both the same and different; metaphor of figure and ground as a way of understanding this: common humanity (ground) and gender difference (figure), both the same and different. The common ground is essential to help us to engage with difference without appropriating or being appropriated by the other, without being reduced to the same (p. 43).
- The relationship between women and men is paradigmatic for the problematic of meeting the Other.
- The relationship between women and men is enigmatic, ambiguous.
- The problem is not the difference but the evaluation of the difference (p. 69).

- Internal worlds play a role in understanding as well as creating the external world.
- The way in which girls and boys experience their relationships with others and thus develop a sense of self.
- Women need to develop an identity without being colonised by significant others-not falling victim to 'cultural cannibalism' (Irigaray 1996).
- To take women as being equal to men is deeply flawed from an intellectual point of view, but also a political mistake; it leads to settling in terms of the masculine because the discourse of equality is so deeply embedded in the masculinist conceptions of the human, of sameness (Zerilli 1996).

One of the conclusions from the project evaluation was that there is more similarity than dissimilarity in the way that gender differences are perceived and with regard to the significance of the meaning attributed to these differences. (p.63). Totally opposite and conflicting understandings were the exception.

How is this useful? Thought provoking?

It doesn't focus on power or abuse of power by men against women. Or on women's struggle to get recognition or promotion. The focus on dialogue and opening it up suggests that women and men are moving into relationship in a way which would make it easier for women to challenge abuse and harder for men to sustain it, but at what cost to the women? How much harder are they working than the men to achieve 'dialogue'? There speaks my experience...but what choice do we have?

It has potential to help me develop my consultancy intervention in ABC (chapter 11). Dialogue between men and women, speaking as men and women, as a way of stepping outside of entrenched positions and embattled mindsets and into more exploratory approaches, e.g. for developing measures to tackle specific instances of abuse of power such as sexual/ harassment. This makes me think it's important that I prevent the discussion generated in the inquiry groups from closing down or degenerating into 'problem solving'. I must find ways to keep it open, as this is what generates energy and ideas which can then be taken up through the management systems

Sameness rather than difference as a basis for women's equality is at the core of equal opportunities policy and practice, and of local authority culture. It's also been at the core of my feminism. It is hard to be 'feminine' without signalling acceptance of a social script associated with domesticity and caring and being a decorative and understanding foil to others, and being unfit for roles with status in public life. Yet we are in a time of transition; women in public

office and top jobs and sexual harassment made public and challenged on unprecedented scale. Will this set of issues disappear in the next generation?

Accepting the 'otherness of the other ' offers an alternative strategy for asserting, demanding acceptance of women in senior positions in the workplace, in public office, in public life. And perhaps a way of conceptualising the difficulties between women that have arisen in my research and practice:

Might it be possible to speak / act as a female self without being 'othered'? Marginalised, or devalued? This text offers an explanation for consistent devaluing, but what alternative strategies might be developed from this approach?

My research has focused on relationships between women who could be described as feminists, or in some way associated with challenging women's inequality. I have explored what happens when they make alliances and found that what got in the way were inner world barriers as well as outer world: distrust, suspicion, perceiving each other as 'the enemy', betrayal, joining the 'other'. In addition that there was a minefield of explosive emotionality which came into play in relationships between women in positions of power and women who tried to work with them. These sometimes took the form of expectations for support that could not be met within their new organisational roles and perceptions of betrayal when this was not forthcoming. To achieve change we have to work with internal as well as external barriers to change; with internalised models of power and authority that are also gendered. To do this we need to conceptualise these challenges.

How / do women use gender to break through and take up authority? How / do women in power, in particular those with a history of commitment to advancing women's equality, create spaces for more women to come forward as leaders? How do women set boundaries when socialisation dictates that they do not, that boundaries are set for them and used to keep us in mother, virgin, whore modes - or to de-sex us entirely? Are there boundaries that women themselves set through silences, strategies of inclusion or exclusion, or by using irony?

TEXT 2

Collette Oseen (1997)

Luce Irigaray, sexual difference and theorising leaders and leadership

I am really excited reading the first paragraph again of this article:

- Leadership is framed as idealised masculinity.
- The heroine needs new plots, new myths, a new symbolic structure if she is to be represented, and if new ways of thinking about leaders and leadership are to be thought which create a space for women other than as imitation men. What we need is not the nostalgia of archaeology but the audacity of creation; just as Irigaray is not making the case for the excavation of some mythical women's realm but the intellectual daring of thinking what has not yet been thought.
- It is the symbolic realm, not only or primarily the socio-political structures which maintains men's pre-eminence, their position as the One, the sexually indifferent which obscures the sexually specific. This position of the One denies theorising of sexual difference which would create a space for women as speaking subject as well as create a space for the rejected male body which has hitherto been projected into women (p.170).
- Presumed fixed link between *what we are* and *what we do* (p.171). The answer is neither the erasure of women, nor adding stereotypical female leaders to stereotypical male leaders. Instead to explore the Irigarayan notion of the 'not yet invented she' which lies in the subversion of the metaphysical order and the invention of 'neither one nor two'.
- Feminist critique of Western philosophy, language and thought as dependent on binary oppositions (the same v different). Exclusion of women from the subject position has been made possible by the structuring of language itself, and Western philosophy ensures that men fill the subject position so that women can be object.
- We need a symbolic order where women are represented symbolically as ourselves, not as men with a lack 'where the other sex is defined in relation to men as mother, virgin or whore' (p.173).

My Reflections

Irigaray's project is to expose the network of images and representations in which women and femininity are in some necessary relationship to men and masculinity, and to show that it is based on a series of assumptions within which women are the rejected parts of men. Women need to set themselves up in contiguity to men, not in opposition' (174).

The project is to construct a symbolic that has many more places for women than those they have been allowed to inhabit. Representations between and among women other than the maternal, new myths that can represent women and men in subject to subject relations and express hitherto unthought of and creative ways of relating to one another and of leading *contiguously* (p.180).

We could analyse leadership differently by thinking about all the activities of organising of which leadership is a part, but which do not require domination or subordination; dynamic shared activities, where people both learn from each other and teach, where difference is 'side by side' not 'more' or 'less'.

Now the methodology in ILvB makes more sense: to focus on the specificity of how women or men do leadership; through dialogue create contiguity rather than opposition between men and women. Could this kind of dialogue be a way forward for women managers in ABC?

Irigaray seems useful in highlighting the desperate need to create a female symbolic. In ABC this is really apparent; the findings of the inquiry groups show that both women and men feel pressure to 'fit in' to the masculinist idea of top down 'blow a power hole to get things done' decisive leadership (chapter 11).

But does Oseen hide the extent to which some women have already achieved this? How would we recognise it when it appears? And why only one?

TEXT 3

Carlene Boucher (1997)

How Women Socially Construct Leadership using Organisations: a study using memory work

December 30 1997

Just read this study - a good illustration of what it means *in practice* not to have myths, symbolic representations of women's leadership, and of how this can be a significant barrier to women *taking up authority* when they are in senior positions i.e. to *feeling* powerful in relation to others, to being able to exercise power with or over people, to build credibility with them.

[Male gendered internalised images of leaders emerged as a barrier to women being perceived as having authority as leaders in my research on women in the public sector (Page / Lorandi 1991)]

I had thought about these issues in terms of gendered internalised images but now see the potential of the idea of myths, a symbolic realm in a wider sense, as a useful construct to

use in my inquiry. Perhaps I could formulate some questions for a small inquiry group at ABC, or for women consultants? This could be a way of conceptualising the interface between *inner and outer conditions* for democracy, and strategies and practices of / for reworking them.

A summary of key points from CB

- Women's constructions of leadership were located in the home and community; in these men went to work and led in organisations
- Women were absent from their constructions of leadership in organisations, therefore they found taking on a leadership role difficult and uncomfortable.
- Even within the home and community women's leadership was constructed in a limited way. They must *influence*, not *tell*; if they were too forceful or aggressive they were a 'bossyboots'.
- Once you became a leader you were different; leadership was about being different to those who used to be your friends.
- Women illustrated fighting against these constructions of female leadership in order to lead in ways which felt authentic and meaningful; they rejected male leadership qualities such as emotional distance, objectivity, unconditional confidence.
- Their leadership they felt must be credible and believable, competent to do the task
- The cost of resisting was self-doubt, not in their competence but in how they talked about being leaders, naming themselves as leaders in organisations.

Further reflections

This approach opens up ways of moving away from the universalising tendencies of previous texts by focusing on the specifics of what leadership means to different women. What language is used by them/us to talk about it, or represent ourselves in leadership roles, including consultancy? Also to explore how women who come into 'leadership' maintain their relationships to others?

Interview contributors spoke of difficulty that women moving into leadership have in repairing relationships with women constructed on the basis of shared opposition or 'outsider' status in organisations. They and some of the women managers in refugee organisations [case study 1] suggested that women have or are often expected to have more permeable work / personal boundaries, and that this can have generative and degenerative effects.

In what ways do I establish my authority as consultant in relation to project leaders when boundaries were / not permeable, as in my contrasting relationships to project leaders in the Persephone [case study 3] and ELP projects [case study 2]? How do my own expectations relate to anecdotes about staff expectations of being nurtured by their women managers?

TEXT 4

Sylvia Gherardi (1995)

Gender, Symbolism and organisational Cultures

Its Jan. 1 1998 - New Year's day - and everything feels new and pristine. I finally overcame resistance to reading and started SG, opening the book at random and lighting on chapter 3, 'The Alchemic Wedding'. Many of my dreams are about coupling in some way with a male figure; my brother, a colleague/ helper who would show me around the estate/ area in which I was working and therefore responsible, show me the eagles' nests, share the sense of danger, threat. An offer of protection or to share in the danger and learn how to protect myself/each other. Remembering the motorcycle dream, my brother driving, realising we would not make it round the corner of the mountain road, soaring over snowy fields, putting out my feet and guiding us to a gentle sliding halt, averting disaster.
Wondering how to interpret these; now, reading SG, the possibility of thinking of the symbolic aspect of gender in some way. Could have done this before using Jung but this possibility seems alive again.

Key ideas:

- The alchemic wedding as metaphor for exploring a different way of thinking about gender in organisations: as a union of supreme contraries *and* process of transformation, a relation of both/ and, *and* either/ or archetypal models of femaleness and the ways in which these elicit or activate a corresponding state of maleness.
- The archetype preserves an imprint ('typos') and conveys it into a multiplicity of contingent forms; they are cultural patterns that recur

The alchemic wedding emphasises inseparability *and* separation. It symbolises moving away from dichotomous thinking, in which the way one gender is defined defines the other by default. How to move away from strategies which either attack male or female stereotypes or assert the specificity of the female.

In the world of work and organisations, cultural models of femaleness have archetypal features which fashion different patterns of womanhood, and structure different gender relationships, each with a corresponding model of maleness. SG sets out a typology using the Greek gods of virgin and vulnerable goddesses, showing their corresponding roles within the family. She gives examples of alliances that form between archetypal figures of women and men and illustrates with reference to family dynamics (pp. 82/3), and work 'couples'.

Organisations draw upon the family as a *symbolic reservoir* from which they may tap *an emotional reservoir* to exploit the association of masculinity with authority (p.92)

So how can we shift these gender oppositions? Women's dual presence in the workplace and domestic sphere has mobilised *both/and* thinking, showing how increasing numbers of men and women operate in both universes. The boundaries between the symbolic universes of man and women became more fluid; enabling us to think and do gender differently. This concept of 'dual presence' creates a mental space in which boundaries are blurred, in which the signification of female presence in the male symbolic universe must be invented, and vice versa.

The greatest danger of opposition is that it *mistakes form for substance*, that it takes as constitutive of things what is in fact an epistemological procedure for setting them in order, for talking about them, drawing distinction between them.

Reflections

How much scope is there really for women to do gender differently? How much willingness is there from men and from women to respond to women doing it differently, to do gender differently together, jointly?

What is my own investment in doing gender in oppositional ways? Am I invested in representing women in victim roles? Afraid of losing touch with representations of male power, and the material realities of oppression.

This approach does offer a way of mapping a broader spectrum of interactions between men and women than is possible from a focus on negative behaviours and 'misbehaviour' associated with equal opportunities policies; for exploring the expectations associated with the paradigm rather than on the behaviours interpreted through the paradigm. .

Reading and writing this has been an anxious process. Not being task focused is scary. Not knowing what the product will be, or whether there will be one at all- for my labours. Why am I doing this? Would it not be better to simply allow myself to drift, read novels, create a garden, learn how to paint? Decorate my house? Am I recreating a compulsion to drive myself ever onward, another challenge, and another goal, unable to let go, to simply be? Now I want to reframe the purpose of my inquiry as finding out, discovering what is the writing I want to do, in a supportive setting. What is it that seeks expression in me, and how will I express it through my writing? Who will publish it? How will I find a voice?

January 4th 1998

I've had another go at reading *Gender, Symbolism and Organisational Cultures.* I'm frustrated at how much time and concentration it demands and am still unsure what substance there is to the content. I've grasped a few general ideas - don't have energy or time for more-and feel frustrated, teased - would have liked more by now.

From Chapter 4: 'The symbolic order of gender in organisations'

The title of this chapter really excites me. Somehow it seems to express where my interest lies at the moment in making sense of what is going on in ABC. The idea that it is *how meanings are made* which is at the root of gendered power: *what story gets told and is legitimated.*

In ABC, (chapter 11), is the story of sexual harassment and of the exclusion of women who protest believed? Is there confusion among the men who perpetrate about what behaviours are legitimate, what are not? What stories do they tell of what is going on? What would happen if the focus moved to the narrative and away from the behaviour? When the battle is for one version, one narrative only is recognised as official? Could there be an approach to harassment that recognised multiplicity of meanings - yet which would set standards for behaviour?

[In chapter 11, my third case study, I show how my consultancy approach drew from these ideas].

More key ideas

'Doing gender'

SG starts the following chapter - doing gender in the workplace - with the story of how spitting moved from acceptable to unacceptable social behaviour over the course of the 16th - 18th centuries (Elias 1978: pp 288-92). She talks about gender as an activity and asks

what do we do when we 'do gender'? Is it possible to do 'one' gender ' and avoid 'second sexing' the other (p. 128)? She reminds us that the previous chapters talked about separate symbolic systems produced by and producing of gender difference.

'Institutional reflexivity'

This term refers to the interactive production of sexual difference, and to the social situations that ensure that society 'naturally' expresses the sexual division of reward and labour. Institutional reflexivity simultaneously conceals contradictions between the actual practices of sexed persons and their symbolic universes, and reveals social arrangements along gender lines.

The presence of women in the workplace breaks with the symbolic order of gender that is based on separation between male and female, public and private, production and reproduction. The co-presence of the sexes gives greater ambiguity to gender based social differentiation.

The dual presence has to be managed through 'doing gender'. This is done *both* by re-establishing the social order of gender based on male domination and the devaluation of the female presence, *and* by introducing transgression and de-legitimation of the principles on which that order is erected (p.129).

The 'results' of feminism can be read either in terms of numbers (how many women where), or in terms of *de-legitimating the beliefs that sustain power relationships between the sexes.* Like the big spittoon that was at first not concealed, then concealed, then disappeared, de-legitimated.

The rest of chapter 5 is concerned with mapping how we *do* gender:

> 'Doing gender involves using symbols, playing with them and transforming them; managing the dual presence; shuttling between a symbolic universe coherent with one gender identity and the symbolic realm of 'the other' gender. We do gender through *'ceremonial'* and *'remedial'* work [my italics] (p. 131*).*

Courtesy work and rituals are examples of ceremonial (assertion of gender difference) and repair work (where gender order is disrupted, broken). Irony and sarcasm can be used effectively to *preserve difference without reproducing inequality.*

What makes the work of repairing the symbolic order of gender so laborious is the *difficulty of preserving difference without reproducing inequality* (p.138).

When we speak of doing gender as an interactive activity, situationally and historically constructed, we are defining the rules and norms that regulate gender citizenship in a particular culture, and therefore determine the amount of remedial work required. This might range from play and playfulness to the open conflict and war between the sexes (p.139).

Changing the narrative

Both men and women are caught in the gender trap, and mobilise relational resources to play the game: irony as destabilisation of gender values, trust as the ability to change the frame from asymmetrical to reciprocal, embarrassment as a signal of a change in custom (p.142).

The ironist is able to switch discourses, to cast doubt on the rules and procedures which govern a discourse and the relationship between people and language, to play with categories, and to lay bare the power relationship which tie us to a gender identity (p.146), to engage in Socratic dialogue which exposes hidden contradictions in an apparently logical statement.

Finally, SG asks, could the relationships between the sexes be more equal if organisations were less rational and more emotional? Organisation cultures both express how their members feel and socialise them into feeling in a particular way; emotionality is present and necessary for work - the question is ,why it is censored out of texts on organisational life (pp. 150-60)?

Further reflections

Moving the focus of attention to what we are actively doing to de/construct gender relations is exciting. So is the idea of establishing a meta-discourse about how we do gender, finding ways of creating spaces to do this using irony and playfulness. Of course it presupposes willingness to enter into 'play' mode and not resort to punitive use of power by men - or victim mode by women. In other words, willingness to recognise the game as a game, to see the rules as open to challenge or change.

In her previous chapter, 'The symbolic order of gender', SG develops the metaphor of the woman traveller (pp. 108-122) to develop a typology of the experiences of a woman who is

the first to arrive in a non-traditional work area. She illustrates how men protected their territory and prevented women from moving into it. She stresses that women have to not only move into positions of power, but learn how to take it up when they are in them.

Her example is of a woman who through a *'new narrative self'* contested the way she had been positioned, created new alliances, and challenged demarcation of the territory as a male domain' (p.115) changing the rules and positioning herself as 'boss'. To do this she had to recognise and reject her previous positioning as someone tolerated because she was seen as temporary, moving through and acting on the authority of her father, the managing director, and use her own discretionary powers. SG describes this taking up of authority as *changing the narrative, a relational process involving redefining herself in relation to others.*

This story appeals to me as changing the narrative is an inner process as well as an external negotiation. My question is: what needs to happen in order for women to accomplish this? We need more stories of how women have done it...used irony etc. and changed the script.

January 16

There are so many questions and themes I would like to pursue. The other night I didn't go to the meeting I had been looking forward to. I simply lost the leaflet with the venue on it, found it after the meeting had started, and realised I was too exhausted to go. Or no longer willing to sacrifice my physical well being. Yet I had gone without a break all day out of sheer impatience to finish working-so that I could go. Embattled mentality determination to vanquish, prove I can get on top.

It's as if some personal struggle to win out has consumed all ability to work towards wider ends. Me the individual and her struggle to earn an income and do her work well and generate more of it and find her own satisfaction in her own work has successfully supplanted me the political activist.

This conflict between business and political goals is being played out in the tension between business and advocacy in approaches to consultancy with my feminist consortium partners [chapter 4]. In contrast when working with a male business partner the situation is clear, we are angling for business. Yet I have not worked with him before and do not know and will not know until we start whether I can trust him not to abuse his power. Will there really be space for me to work from my integrity or will he use his influence and business based credibility with the (male) senior client contact to frame the work in a way which

excludes my equalities perspective? There is an unknown, we have different perspectives. I am not expecting him to be 'on my wavelength'; I will have to be responsible for my own views and integrity.

In both I feel alternately exhilarated and afraid; am I colluding with something I can't control, deluding my self about possibility for 'subject to subject' dialogue and collaboration, when I am actually in some danger?

Does all of this deny some realities of power that seriously put me and the values for which I am allied at risk?

Subsequent Reflections

Re-engaging with this material in order to construct this chapter I am struck by the power it still holds for me, and how throughout my inquiry I continued to be stimulated by the conceptual frames offered by these texts. In these subsequent reflections I seek to signpost my use of these ideas in subsequent cycles of my inquiry, and to compensate for the limitations of the commentary I wrote at the time.

My consultancy practice had developed from feminist campaigns and local government equal opportunities practice, both of which aimed to remove structural barriers to women's inequality, and to change discriminatory behaviours. However I had not found these approaches useful in understudying barriers to feminist collaboration. To explore this, I had become increasingly interested in exploring different ways in which women *enact* and *perceive* the dynamics of gendered power, in relation to men and in relation to each other. The psychodynamic theory I had been using offered the systemic analysis I sought, but in its approach to gender was limited by its roots in Freudian and Kleinian theory and their notions of gender and sexuality. These texts offered an alternative basis for systemic analysis of the interface between internal and external worlds that acknowledged both individual choice in how gender was enacted and institutionalised power in how these choices were presented and structured.

Through engaging critically with the conceptual frames offered by these key texts I explored ways of conceptualising gendered power which sought to address agency, representation and interpretation of women's inequality in relation to gender divisions. I

loosened my hold on dualistic ways of conceptualising gender difference that underpinned oppositional strategies, and began to experiment with conceptual frames which allowed more space for doing gender differently within relationships. Through inquiry practices I introduced a more dialogic approach into my consultancy strategies.

While I did not explore further the epistemological notion of gender difference as a paradigm for 'otherness', I did take up the notion that the reproduction of gender divisions is a multi-levelled process, taking place through systems of representation, mediated by institutionalised power. I based my consultancy approach in ABC on the notion of the need for a female symbolic to affirm women in leadership roles. In my second case study I describe how I was inspired by the notion of using irony to play with gender and sexual identity, asserting identity difference while challenging inequality (chapter 11).

Finally, I take up the notion of dialogue as subject to subject v subject to object interaction in my analysis of consultancy interactions in my case studies, and conceptualise this further chapter 12.

Part 2

The following text is taken from an early draft of my research report on the experience of women managers in refugee organisations (Evelyn Oldfield 1998). It contains an overview of the literature on women in management, and was written six months after the literature reviews in Part 1 above. Permission to use this text was requested from the commissioning organisation.

Current themes in Western management research on women managers and gender relationships in organisations

What are the differences associated with men and women in leadership in organisations? How are they experienced by women and by men? What are the barriers and opportunities for women? What interest is this to organisations and their male managers?

Western research focuses overwhelmingly on white women and men and is conducted mostly by white Western researchers. Nevertheless the broad themes and dilemmas it addresses are

very similar to those described by members of the Women Managers Support Group (WSMG) and by participants at the recent seminar on compassionate leadership. Relevant findings from this research would need to be explored for their relevance and usefulness to the dialogue which it is hoped will open up between women and men.

In the following I summarise the questions asked within this research and the findings which seem relevant to the discussions of the WMSG. Full references are listed separately. As the literature is extensive, I have referred to key texts only. The summary is intended to give an overview of the literature and of the connections and linkages between questions asked by specific studies.

- **Do women and men *define* effective leadership and management differently?**
  - In Western countries research found that both men and women managers perceive the characteristics of the ideal manager to be those they associated with the typical man but not with the typical woman. (Schein 1973 and 1975). By the late 80's studies showed that these perceptions were still held by men but no longer by women. (Alimo Metcalf 1995). Similar studies from other cultures, such as Hong Kong, and Turkey (Katrinli and Ozmen 1995) also found that male managers held more prejudicial attitudes against women than female managers did (de Lion and Suk-Ching 1995). The widely supported belief by male managers that typical male characteristics are prerequisites for effective management revealed the close coupling of management with masculinity:

    > The specific image of an ideal manager varies across cultures, yet everywhere it privileges those characteristics that the culture associates primarily with men. (Adler and Izraeli 1994, p 13)

- **Do women exhibit different ways of leading to men *in their actual practice?***
  - Some studies conclude yes, some no (see Eagly and Johnson in Vinnicombe and Colville 1995 for a summary of the literature; also de Matteo 1994; Ferrario 1991; Still 1994.
  - 'One sex difference that tends to be maintained in a variety of research situations is that women were found to adopt a more participatory democratic style and men a more autocratic one' (Eagly and Johnson in Vinnicombe and Colville 1995).

Do women managers *describe themselves* as *having a different management style to men*?

◊ Studies have shown women more likely to describe themselves as transformational leaders, using interactive participatory leadership styles, and men more likely to describe themselves as transactional leaders, using a more top down style (Rosener 1990).

- **What are the differences *ascribed* to women managers and leaders *by researchers*?**

  ◊ Differences are ascribed to women and men by researchers. Gilligan's research was the first to claim that women's and men's social conditioning results in totally different sets of values and priorities and ways of approaching decision-making (Gilligan 1993). Her research has been taken up by researchers into gendered ways of knowing (Belenky et al, 1986) and management researchers such as Helgeson (1990), whose book is a good summary of examples of how some women in senior positions have built on their strengths to construct their own approach to management and leadership in their organisations:

  - Women managers integrate workplace and private spheres, communicate & share information, prefer to work through networks not hierarchies; see themselves as at the centre of their organisations not on top, demonstrate caring, valuing and maintaining relationships, focus on process as well as outcome. M*ale managers* focused on ends not means, were more compartmentalised, sacrificed time with family to work time, used information to build their own power bases, saw themselves as at the top of a hierarchy or chain of command (Helgeson 1990).
  - Women are more caring, men are more instrumental; women are more collaborative, men work more autonomously; women are more people oriented and more likely to understand individual needs, men will defend their teams and look after their interests; women will prioritise service delivery, men entrepreneurship (Gilligan 1993; Alimo Metcalf 1995).

- **Do women and men *expect* women managers and leaders to be more compassionate and caring than men?**

  ◊ Studies suggest that this is so, but that this is often in conflict with other qualities they associate with effective management or leadership. Graves Dumas (1985) describes how demands to be ever-present and all-caring have undermined the ability of black women managers to effectively carry out their full range of responsibilities in their leadership roles.

- **Do all women *experience* similar dilemmas in how to establish credibility as leaders?**
  - ◊ It appears so, but they adopt different strategies to deal with them, and do not necessarily identify them as related to gender (Page/Lorandi 1992; Marshall 1995).
  - ◊ Organisations have their own cultures or assumptions about the right way of doing things and these create barriers for women in being effective as leaders (Newman & Maddock and Parkin in Itzin and Newman 1995).
  - ◊ However there are exceptions, which draw upon traditional culture to illustrate wider concepts of leadership by female leaders honoured in minority cultures (Green 1990).
  - ◊ Writings by black women managers demonstrate that racism creates additional barriers for black and minority ethnic women gaining access to and being effective in leadership roles and suggests that race and gender are intertwined in both barriers and strategies available to them (Bravette 1996; Hite 1996).
  - ◊ Writings about managing diversity focus on the business advantages of encouraging organisations to create diverse workforces - gender, race and ethnicity, age, disability -in order meet demands of the market (IPD 1997).
  - ◊ Few writers on management address the need to work with unequal power in order to create a genuinely diverse workforce. An exception is an approach which starts from recognition of unequal power between members of different social groups, using 'power balancing strategies and 'standpoint work' to 'change the lenses of organisational members':

> Understanding our own racial and gender identities is not sufficient; we must understand our inter-group interactions, how we automatically and unconsciously behave as members of our groups and the effects this has on the members of other groups (p.479).
>
> Dominant group members should examine institutional policies and practices rather than assuming there is only one way for the organisation to function efficiently, and listen to members of non dominant groups, who must continue to give voice to their realities.
>
> Calvert and Ramsey 1996: 480

- **Should women leaders in organisations work from their difference, or try to fit in to male defined expectations of leadership?**
  - ◊ Increasingly research demonstrates that attempts by women to fit in are doomed to fail, and lead to burn out (Marshall 1995); women do better cultivating their own unique qualities

within leadership roles, and developing appropriate support structures to make this possible (Oseen 1997).

- **What about differences and inequalities between women?**
  - ◊ Women do not all adopt the same leadership style; they adopt different strategies for managing; not all women choose to put 'feminine' qualities forward in their management roles (Gherardi 1995).
  - ◊ Black and minority ethnic women experience double discrimination and have to contend with stereotypes based on gender and ethnic origin (Nkomo 1988).
  - ◊ While black women's experience is specific and differentiated it should not always be assumed to be different from white women or from black men. There will be similarities as well as differences depending on the contexts (Bhavnani 1994).

- **Redefining the problem - and the solutions**
  - ◊ Current research is redefining the problem - and the focus of the solutions: women have the skills - their primary need is not for more training but for men and in many cases women to 'see' women's competence and potential and to accept their authority in management and leadership roles (Adler and Izraeli 1994; Wahl 1998).
  - ◊ Interventions need to focus on opening up dialogue between women and men, and encouraging men to listen to women as different but equal within their management roles (van Beinum 1997).
  - ◊ One aspect of this dialogue is research into the links between management and masculinities; if men can find different ways of being masculine, this may help open up more ways of being managers (Collinson and Hearn 1996).
  - ◊ For this strategy to succeed male leaders of organisations must demonstrate that they recognise the value of women managers' contribution, and use their power to challenge resistance from their colleagues; the responsibility and the benefits are owned by the organisation - and not by women alone (Adler and Izraeli 1994; Opportunities 2000, 1998).

Subsequent Reflections

The women refugee managers with whom I spoke placed their experiences in the context of a wider struggle by women against male power. They also asserted the cultural and historical specificity of their dilemmas and inter-generational as well as

other differences in how these were experienced. Part of their lived reality was cultural and political displacement, and the need to defend and sustain refugee communities in the face of racism and sexism. At least one member of the group to whom I spoke placed their struggle to assert gender difference in their approach to leadership in the context of feminist social and political struggle.

In my case study I refer to the seminar where participants described gender identity as fluid, in process of redefinition. However the culture of their communities was conflictual, oppositional and heavily defended. It did not seem surprising to me that in this environment the predominant notion of 'management' and of 'leadership' was top down, heroic and male, and that while women were not perceived to be competent managers they were expected to take up caring, nurturing and peacekeeping roles. In this context it was difficult for 'women' to be 'managers' without giving up their gender identity:

> The question is, do we perceive the woman manager as a strong woman or as a strong (and genderless} person?
> Evelyn Oldfield 1998 p.16

In this overview, I drew from several research strands. One of these was research into women in management. This was concerned with women as different /or not; how woman and men enact, interpret and represent gender difference; and the specific discrimination and strategies adopted by black women managers. In my report I framed this overview within the parameters of the political strategy devised by my client. Her strategy was to assert the value of gender specific attributes associated with women's approaches to managing organisations, and on this basis to challenge male definitions of good management.

As I show in my case study, I resisted temptation to frame the research solely as a confrontation (chapter 9). Drawing from the texts I reviewed in Part 1 of this chapter, I introduced the notion that women as well as men do have choices in how to enact and represent gender relations. On this basis I appealed to men as well as women to continue to explore the variety of ways in which gender, race, ethnicity and political context interweave, and the multiple ways in which they could enact management and leadership.

Conclusions

In the context of my overall inquiry, this overview enabled me to make an important distinction between how women *enacted* leadership or management, and how this was *interpreted* by themselves, by male and female colleagues in their organisational context, and by researchers.

This distinction is central to each of my case studies (chapters 9, 10, 11). In them I explored the tension between individual and collective strategies which women managers adopted in these gendered organisational contexts, and the meaning which others invested in them. I then returned to selected research texts in order to conceptualise further my feminist consultancy practice (chapter 12). I reflect on the politics of my analysis in the 'Red Threads' which interleaf these chapters.

Section 3

Inquiry as Consultancy Practice

A core inquiry question that emerged from the previous section was how can women sustain and nurture subjectivity, identity and ways of enacting power and leadership when these are at odds with predominant masculinist cultures?

The discussions with contributors in Chapter 6 about their experiences of working with women in organisations suggested that:

- Women drew on political or alternative belief systems to work against social conditioning.
- This was necessary to exercise generative forms of power and authority in relation to each other as well as in relation to men.
- In work environments which devalued women's professional competence; women tended to form alliances on the basis of exclusion, and to have difficulty maintaining these when a reward or insider status was achieved.
- This posed specific challenges for feminist consultancy and collaboration.
- Consultancy practices developed for sustaining women in resisting predominant gender cultures were concerned with how to maintain generative balance between nurturing and challenge.

In Chapter 7 I picked up the thread of exploring how to sustain a generative sense of self in devaluing social environments. Through inquiry practices I explored, enacted and conceptualised alternative strategies for nurturing subjectivity and developed different forms of agency in connection.

The texts reviewed in the first part of Chapter 8 focussed on the challenges of moving from binary opposition in conceptualising and enacting gender. They suggest that to enact gender differently the 'the otherness of the other' must be acknowledged and represented. The focus on enactment as a means to reproduce or challenge gendered power relations, offered potential for conceptualising how gendered power is enacted by women in relation to each other.

In the following section I explore in greater depth the issues associated with power and trust that I identified with contributors in chapter 6. I describe my experience of the challenges of maintaining 'subject to subject' interactions with women within my consultancy. In chapter 12, I further conceptualise these challenges and the associated skills for feminist consultancy.

Chapter 9

Case Study 1

Negotiating Power and Voice: Dilemmas for Feminist Inquiry

Summary

This case study is the first of three. It explores dilemmas I experienced during a consultancy assignment to write a research report designed to validate the experiences of refugee women managers. Conflict arose when accreditation of my authorship of the publication was withheld. This raised methodological, ontological and political dilemmas for me, which I explore through inquiry in this case study.

Through the inquiry described in this case study I explore the generative and shadow sides of a feminist collaboration within a consultancy relationship. I reflect on my relationship to the research data, the process through which I engaged with and interpreted it and how the affinity I experienced in relation to the data intertwined with political and ethical challenges that were played out in relation to my client. I introduce the theme of mutual recognition as a destructive or creative force between women in organisations; this theme is first introduced in my analysis of interviews in chapter 6, and explored further in the two subsequent case studies.

This case study begins with a brief account of how I came to write it. In the narrative that follows I situate the research dilemmas I am exploring within the context of the consultancy contract. I then reflect on the research dilemmas that speak to my wider inquiry focus on relationships between women who are working towards gender equality in organisations.

The second 'Red Thread' which follows this chapter contains a further cycle of reflection and analysis.

How I came to write this case study

This case study is the penultimate cycle of an inquiry that began as a consultancy contract, and ended as a reflection on issues that arose within the consultancy relationship. It is based on a paper I presented at the UK Women's Studies Network annual conference in July 1999. The initial purpose of this paper was to bring myself into voice in a way that was not possible within the research assignment. In doing so I hoped to compensate for the experience of being silenced as author of the research report and subsequent publications.

In writing this case study I explored the issues that had arisen in the hope that this might prepare me to repair the working alliance with my client. Throughout this process my inquiry provided me with a means to disentangle the complex web of political, professional and methodological issues which had arisen for me, and to work through the conflicting emotion generated by the conflict which had developed with my client.

In the following summary I briefly describe my inquiry activities in relation to the events leading up to writing this case study:

- In 1997 I drafted the research report, published as *Compassionate Leadership; a Question of Gender? The experience of women managers in refugee organisations (Evelyn Oldfield 1998).* During my drafting I struggled with dilemmas generated by the tension between the positivist approach which was integral to the political strategy adopted by my client and my wish to make my interpretive role explicit within the text. I decided to frame the process of exploration in which my clients were engaged as inquiry, and in the draft text of my research report made explicit the interpretive processes in which my clients and I had each separately been engaged. I presented the women manager's experiences as both gender specific and diverse, and on this basis framed the report as an invitation to men to engage in a dialogue about gender specific approaches to management.
- I discussed this approach with my clients; while references to my own interpretive role were edited out of the text, my framing of my clients experiences in my report

as a process of inquiry was accepted. My clients also accepted my use of this framing as a basis for inviting men to dialogue with women about their experiences as managers.

- I discussed my final draft with my clients and incorporated their suggestions and editorial feedback into the text.
- In discussions with my client about dissemination and marketing it became apparent that in line with the organisation's policy I was not to be named as author of the publication. In response to my representations my client suggested a compromise to which I agreed, though which my role was acknowledged in the report as 'collating material and referencing it to management literature'. In return my client agreed that I could use the report as the basis for academic publications submitted in my own name at a future date. This was consistent with earlier discussions about my possible further involvement in dissemination and practical training for implementation of the report.
- The publication was launched in January 1998. At the event I was not publicly acknowledged, although one of the women I had worked on with draft text and who introduced the report at the event apologised for this subsequently. In response to my direct approach the director of the client organisation gave me positive feedback about my work on the publication. I interpreted this lack of acknowledgement as political unease, and contained my discomfort as inappropriate to the occasion.
- I submitted an abstract to UK Women's Studies Network (WSN) annual conference in which I describe my paper as 'reinserting my own voice' into the text of the research. My intention was to write a paper exploring my relationship to the research material. When accepted I contacted my client and invited her to discuss my plan for the paper and a possible joint presentation at the conference.
- My client responded by asking me to withdraw my abstract, and indicated that her organisation was concerned that I intended to use research data that did not appear in the research report. A copyright dispute developed with legal representations. I felt my good faith had been abused and asserted my rights to copyright.
- After much deliberation and discussion of the ethical issues with other feminist researchers, my supervisor and members of my inquiry group, I decided to make the focus of my paper the research issues raised for me by the dispute. I set out to work with my anger and sense of betrayal, and explore their ethical and political

implications. I discussed draft versions of this paper with my supervisor and inquiry group, worked with their feedback, and prepared my presentation.

- My presentation at the WSN conference was not well attended. After the event I invited feedback from individual participants. This suggested they were more interested in the research findings of my original report than in the methodological issues I was addressing in my paper and that more contextual detail was needed for them to make sense of the material I had presented. It was not however possible to provide this without identifying the client organisation. This left me with a dilemma; I wanted to protect my client organisation from adverse publicity, but also to hold them to our agreement that I could publish in my own name.
- I discussed the ethical issues related to my role and contract again with my inquiry group, and decided not to submit my paper to the conference publication. Still flooded by anger I embarked on further cycles of reflection and discussion of the methodological and political issues raised for me through the experience. My concern now was to use the learning from my experience to clarify my stance as a feminist action researcher.
- I began to draft my case study using notes taken throughout the process, my reflections on feedback from CARPP group members, and discussions with feminist researchers.
- In final cycles of this inquiry track I re-engaged with the process from the position I had arrived at in the closing phase of writing this thesis. These reflections are in the 'Red Thread' which follows this chapter.

Research dilemmas

Agency and subjectivity in the research alliance

In this section I situate the research dilemmas I am exploring within the context of the consultancy relationship.

In my WSN paper I described the key dilemma which I experienced thus:

I agreed to be a channel for the voices of others to come into the public arena – but now I have discovered I too have a need to be heard. My need seems to be in conflict with the contract I made.

> Does my voice have to be silenced, so others can be heard?
> (Page, July 1999)

My client's strategy was to commission an objective piece of research in order to validate the voices of the research subjects. As the project progressed it became apparent to me that her positivist approach to research had shaped her understanding of my contribution as well as her understanding of research methodology. From her perspective I had taken on the role of validating and not interpreting material, of 'collation' and not 'authorship' (Evelyn Oldfield 1998). The implications of this only became fully apparent to me on completion of the contract.

I approached the contract as a feminist working alliance in which power and values were shared. In doing so however I had not sufficiently taken into account how our different approaches to research method might shape our working alliance. When the report was ready for publication a conflict arose when my client withheld accreditation of my role as author and I attempted to challenge this. This precipitated a crisis in which my client's position was expressed in terms or organisational policy and copyright. Her account of my contribution seemed bounded by notions of 'objectivity' which could not acknowledge the subjectivity and agency that I had actually drawn upon in order to produce the research report.

At this moment of crisis it felt as if the 'I' who had engaged in a collaborative project was erased; as if I was expected to accept for myself the withholding of recognition which my research subjects had challenged in relation to their managerial activities. While I was aware that I had taken on the project in the role of acting as a 'channel' for other voices, I had not expected either to be asked to withhold my name, or to experience this withholding as a moment of erasure. At this moment an 'alliance' for shared political ends became in my felt experience 'collusion' with self-abuse.

How did this situation get constructed? How should I respond to my desire for recognition, while respecting the political position and priorities of my client? How would I now understand the political and ethical issues raised?

My stake in the project: a feminist working alliance

As a first step I will consider my stake in the research project, my initial reservations and how I resolved them in the process of negotiating the consultancy contract.

I first met my client at a voluntary sector workshop on black and minority ethnic women and leadership. She was the development worker of an organisation that provided training and support for refugee organisations in the voluntary sector. After hearing my contribution to the discussion, she asked me if I would be interested in writing a research report for her organisation, using her notes of discussion at meetings of a support group of women managers of refugee organisations. My client had convened meetings of this group over a period of a year. The women were all members of refugee communities and of different cultures and races. The group had now disbanded, and she was determined that something should be written which would profile the support group and the experiences participants had recounted. Her strategy was to seek a researcher who could write up the material in a form that would lend it validity, by referencing it to literature on women in management. The document was to be written in academic mode, as she believed that this would give it credibility in the eyes of the men who were undermining the women managers' authority.

She invited me to read the material to see if I could empathise with it. When I read it I discovered that many of the issues described by the refugee women managers resonated both with my experience of being an equalities consultant, and with experiences described in feminist literature on gendering management and organisation analysis. I entered into discussions to clarify the potential contract between us, including my own stake in the project, and to satisfy myself that I was the right person to do it.

The invitation to write the research report seemed a wonderful and rare opportunity to put the research I had done into service for an action based intervention by and for women. As a feminist action researcher this is how I wanted my research to be used, to create knowledge, but also to challenge oppressive behaviours and practices (Kelly, Burton and Reagan, 1994). I also saw it as a research opportunity to explore dilemmas in which I had a strong stake such as: how to be female and have authority in the public sphere; how to understand race and cultural differences in ways of being women managers and in enacting gender differences. Working with material generated by a multi-cultural group of women in refugee communities seemed to offer potential for engaging with all of these

issues. I was keen to pick up issues I had identified in my previous research, and to which I had referred in my contribution to the workshop where I had met my client (Page and Lorandi 1992). I was also keen to develop my writing for publication in a form that would be of use to other practitioners.

Underneath this was something deeper: a gut feeling of identification with the women who wanted their voices heard and who felt that by writing their experiences others in reading them would understand, listen and in listening would engage with them. In this I was aware that this was an opportunity to engage in research which had meaning for me personally (Marshall 1992).

I had some misgivings. These both concerned the politics of my research role as a white non-refugee feminist working with data belonging to black and white refugee women; and the positivist research strategy on which the contract was based.

As a white feminist non-refugee woman, should I be taking on the task of shaping and making meaning out of material 'belonging' to women of such differently situated identities (Stanley 1997)? Was it right to reference the material to the body of literature on women in management which had itself been criticised for generalising from the experience of white women, and for colluding with silence about the experiences of black women, and indeed other differences of identity and power between women? (Nkomo 1988; Davidson 1997). How could I avoid replicating this silence, in relation to women whose experiences of gender and of race would be specific and almost certainly not addressed within western management literature? Hearing a presentation from Ella Bell (Bell, Nkomo et al 2000) about her research into black and white women's perceptions of each other had sensitised me to the potential for mismatch of meaning between women of different races and cultures as well as the potential rewards for dialogue. I became more aware of my own limited contact with black women managers and researchers, and of how this might limit my understanding of the data.

The way the project was conceived was not consistent with my preferred interactive style of working, itself based on a politics and epistemology with which this project seemed to be in conflict. The main source material was a note of group discussions written by my client, and was therefore secondary rather than primary data. There would be limited opportunities for direct fact to face contact with the women who were the research subjects.

The research project was to write the material up in a traditional academic format, in order to lend it authority and validity in the eyes of the male managers and trustees in the refugee organisations who were not recognising the authority of women managers. However I had moved away from this way of writing; I wanted to make explicit my contribution to making meaning of the material (Mauthner and Doucet 1998). It seemed particularly important to acknowledge the issues of power and identity embedded in the research alliance, and my approach to the material.

I discussed these misgivings with my client. She assured me that on the basis of my empathy with the material, together with my experience and knowledge of the research field, I was qualified for the job; and that the issue of my own identity was not considered a disqualifier. She agreed to my request that members of the group would read and be invited to provide feedback on draft text, and stated that I would work closely with her as editor. My understanding was that we were working to shared objectives, to produce a report that would put the issues identified by her group on the agenda of her organisation, and break the silence surrounding gender issues in the management development programmes they were providing.

On this basis I agreed to take on the project. I felt that as a feminist it was my job to use the power that I had in terms of familiarity with the field and research skills to find a form for the material that would validate it within the strategy they had chosen. I set aside my own preference for a more interactive approach, and agreed to work within the limitations of the possible. In doing so I acted on my self-definition of being a feminist researcher based on a way of being in the world, rather than on a specific research methodology (Stanley 1990).

The seeds of conflict

The research report I was commissioned to write was written as part of a strategy, an action intervention. This strategy contained a number of interesting contradictions which became apparent to me as the research progressed. They proved to be seeds of conflict that I was able to hold in tension, until the moment when accreditation of authorship was withheld.

The content of the report was to be the experience of refugee women managers in refugee organisations, of the gendered dynamics that undermined their authority as

managers. The aim was to assert their reality, as women and as managers, to draw attention to the devaluing of their experience and to assert the value and uniqueness of their contribution. By publishing an academic document which would validate their experiences my client hoped to get a hearing and a response from a male audience which was not willing to listen to these experiences when articulated by the women who owned them. Use of externally validated research on women in management was the strategy to add authority to their voices, an instance of feminist solidarity to be mediated by the academy.

These are the contradictions as I am able to see them now:

- The research was to be 'objective'; my interpretive voice was not to be made explicit. Yet qualities which contributed to my interpretative voice were key selection criteria used by my client for the job: ability to feel empathy with the material; ability to reference material to Western management research from a feminist perspective.
- My client and I approached the material and the contract from a shared feminist, political stance as well as from our contractually defined roles as client and consultant. She had fought hard to get resources from her organisation for the women managers' support group and for this publication, and accepted and expected no recognition for this or for her editorial role. As she pointed out to me, it was not just I who was not accredited in the publication; her name as editor was also absent.
- The material on which the report was based resonated with aspects of my own experience; this resonance enabled me to create something of it (Marshall 1992). At what point can we say that material belongs to you and not to me, when inevitably in order to make meaning we put something of ourselves into what we create as writers and researchers?

These contradictions contained ambiguities that reproduced the gendered dynamics challenged by the research report, albeit for a different purpose. From my perspective they contained painful dilemmas concerning women's collusion in their oppression, silencing attempts to assert the part played by women's subjectivity in creating new knowing. Ironically the research report was an assertion which attempted to break this cycle, making a strategic alliance to assert the value of women's knowing within the context of refugee organisations. In the following section I move into a reflection on my

experience of these issues and describe how the use of inquiry enabled me to clarify my ontological and epistemological stance.

Reflections

Ownership, Validity and Power

When told I was not to be named as author of the report, I negotiated a compromise. I retained the right to use material from the report to author articles in my own name that would be published elsewhere. This satisfied both my desire for individual accreditation and my desire to play a part in disseminating the material. It also seemed to be consistent with the aim of the project – to give validity to the material in its own right, rather than as the product of someone else – the writer.

However this notion of validity confirmed the positivist notion of knowing by re-inscribing objectivity as a basis for knowledge claims. In editing the author / researcher out of the picture it effectively edited out the creative role of the writer. This bore no resemblance to my experience of actively engaging with the material in order to write the report; or to the role of the editor, who had written the research notes. As I thought about this during the process of drafting the report I felt growing unease. How could I represent the creative process of authoring without diminishing the urgency of the material produced by the women with whom I was working? How could I represent my voice in the publication, without seeming to compete for attention from the readers?

Underneath my unease, there was anger too. Why should my contribution be edited out, and why should this be necessary in order to give validity to other women's experience? Was the project not about making explicit a basis for solidarity, for alliance, between women of different cultures, through shared experience? Was not my contribution as a feminist researcher an alliance, an act of solidarity?

During this process my need for recognition as an author became more urgent, as if I were joining with my research subjects from a sense of wanting my voice to be heard too. In asserting the case for recognition of their contribution I was becoming more in touch with my own need for recognition, and less able to forego it.

In subsequent reflection on this process through action inquiry I discovered an ontological basis for my stance as feminist action researcher. My empathy had been rooted in a shared need for recognition and for being valued in my professional role, as well as in a shared sense of acting from the margins. In adding my feminist voice as sense maker to those of the women refugees I had hoped for mutual accreditation. During the consultancy, and for some time afterwards, I was unable and unwilling to suspend this desire, and this brought me into conflict with the terms of the consultancy. In subsequent cycles of inquiry I continued to reflect on this process and arrive at a different understanding. These further reflections are contained in the meta-commentary in the 'Red Thread' that follows this chapter.

Framing Experience as Inquiry

In my approach to the research assignment I had sought to create a research process that was as participatory as possible within the constraints of the consultancy contract.

I negotiated maximum contact with the women who had contributed the material. This was limited as the group had disbanded. Nevertheless I was able to meet once with two individual members and they provided me with detailed feedback on my draft text. Later in the process, my contract was extended to include participation in a seminar organised by the commissioning organisation on 'compassionate leadership'. This seminar was the third in a series for managers of refugee organisations and was intended to focus on gender issues. I attended as a participant observer and this provided opportunities to test my analysis of the secondary material in conversation with women managers, observe gender dynamics in interactions with men, and get a glimpse of the tensions between refugee communities. At this event I was able to see how the political context in which the women were working influenced the ways in which they enacted gender roles. for example at this event it seemed that the role women played in smoothing over these inter-community tensions made it more difficult for them to challenge gender stereotypes as this might have introduced further conflict.

Equally importantly, encouraged by my editor, I had immersed myself in the material, seeking points of empathy and resonance with its themes. I sought to identify these points of resonance, but also to suspend my initial reactions and assumptions. In her account of her process of sense making of the experiences of women managers she interviewed,

Marshall described a similar process. She asks readers to engage in 'a kind of questioning or suspension of initial reactions and assumptions' in engaging with her data and noted that 'in gender related areas this can be particularly challenging' (Marshall 1995, p. 11). As I read my client's notes of discussions by women refugee managers of their experiences, I found meaning both in the process of inquiry in which they were engaged, and in the substance of the experiences they described. On this basis I tried to introduce my own inquiring voice into the text, in order to invite readers into a process of further exploration.

In working with the research data I was aware of temptation to conflate my experience with the experiences described by the research subjects. I sought to maintain the locus of meaning making in the space between our different experiences and to make our interpretative processes explicit. I was aware of both my active process of engagement with the material, and of an immediate resonance, an alchemy that enabled me to shape to find points of contact with the body of literature to I referenced it. I recognised degenerative as well as generative aspects of this process: potential pitfalls of identification based on unchecked assumptions, assumed similarities which might mask significant differences and lead to misinterpretation of the material.

I checked drafts with my editor, and received detailed drafting suggestions and enthusiastic feedback from members of the group. I used the experience of participating in the seminar to inform and check my interpretations of the written material, listening to discussion, observing interactions and talking with participants to check contentious areas. I did not anticipate the difficulty that my close identification with the material would later lead to in pulling back from the conflict that erupted.

In my research report I went a step further to reconcile my research stance with the approach of my research commissioner and feminist co-worker. On the basis of my reading of the accounts by women in the research material I described the members of the support group as engaged in their own inquiry: moving back and forth between different ways of making sense of their experience of being undermined as managers:

> Women managers experienced the constant feeling that in order to be effective they needed to behave like men or even to be male. .... this took the form of a constant inner dialogue: a series of questions which the woman asked herself to make sense of the conflicts she experienced:
> *This is what happened to me; would a man have been expected to do x? have been treated like y?*

Evelyn Oldfield 1998, p. 15

The recurring refrain, would a man or someone better qualified have done what I am doing better or been treated differently, echoed the inner struggles described by some of the women I had interviewed in earlier cycles of this inquiry (chapter 6). Feminist researchers speak of a deeply internalised sense of 'being a fraud' experienced by some women professionals, and relate this to a mismatch between their own sense of competence and gendered images around them of professionalism and of competence in work environments (McIntosh 1985; 1989). In my consultancy development inquiry track I explored some of the identity issues related to my own sense of professional competence (chapter 4). In reading this research data I strongly identified with my research subjects' struggles to reconcile different sets of expectations arising from gender and ethnicity with ways of being managers which could not accommodate them. While noting that the complex issues of race and ethnicity which they explored were absent in my case, I felt there were parallels in my experience of lesbian sexual identity in relation to unspoken heterosexual assumptions within management cultures.

My framing of the research data as an inquiry process enabled me to 'join' with the women whose written accounts were my source material, and to think of them as co-researchers. However as I show below, while I was able to show my research subjects as engaged in an inquiry process, I was not able to bring my own inquiring voice into the text.

This approach shaped my writing style. My account grouped the experiences described by the women managers as a series of inquiry dilemmas with which they are actively engaged, while also illustrating their competence in practice. I used my own commentary to engage the reader in an open process of reflection, rather than to come up with solutions. I used research references to women in management to illustrate feminist challenge to the idea that leadership or management can be gender neutral, focusing on the complexity of gendered assumptions, rather than suggesting that there might be one alternative correct way of resolving the issues.

Invitation to dialogue

I framed the research report as an invitation from the women whose experiences were described in the report to men in the refugee sector to explore gendered and ethnically determined assumptions about the management and leadership of refugee organisations.

This more reflective, dialogic stance towards my research data was one that I had not taken before in my research writing. It was a new departure for me to suggest that women played a part in constructing gender, rather than being only recipients, and to suggest that new forms of engagement by and between male and female actors might be possible (Gherardi 1995; Marshall 1995). In this case it felt appropriate as an action intervention.

Members of the group had been overwhelmed by shared negative experience and a sense of their own powerlessness to resolve complex dilemmas concerning their professional authority in relation to power based on gender and ethnicity in their communities and organisations. Validation of their experiences was needed, and was the basis of my research contract. However I felt there was a danger of constructing the report as a statement of closure that would not allow the research to be used constructively. Framing the research publication as an invitation from the women to dialogue with men within management training and practice was a strategy I discussed and agreed with my editor and with members of the group with whom I met.

Feminist inquiry across situated identities

The women refugee managers identified gendered power relations as an area of common ground for solidarity with other women managers, across the specifics of cultural difference and their history and status as refugees. My reading of their material suggested rich potential for further exploration of differences and similarities between women who find themselves outside the dominant culture of the organisations for which they work. In this section I explore how I engaged as a researcher with the tension between recognizing identity difference between myself and research subjects, and empathy based on shared experience of marginality.

Black women managers speak of their experience of moving back and forth between hostile organisational cultures and affirming cultures at 'home' (Bravette 1996; Davidson 1997). In my report I described how women in refugee communities spoke of challenging gender roles in their communities as well as in their organisations:

> The material is complex, and speaks of how the refugee women managers' experience of gender difference is interwoven with other differences - political, cultural, and social, all of which inform and influence expectations of women

> leaders within refugee projects. The voices of women managers of refugee projects describe the intricate movements back and forth as they negotiate their way between culturally shaped expectations directed towards them as women, and as managers, by their staff, colleagues and management committee members. Unsurprisingly, their discussions did not arrive at a blueprint, or model, for how to be a woman leader or manager in refugee communities, or a precise definition of how she would be different from a male leader or manager. They did convey their urgent need to find a space to share their experience to engage in a dialogue with men about their mutual expectations and experiences of leadership in order to serve more effectively the refugee organisations and communities for which they work, and in order to release the potential of women and men in future generations.
> (Evelyn Oldfield 1998, p. 5)

I drew on a small and growing literature on the experiences of black women and minority ethnic women managers (Davidson, 1997; Bravette, 1996; Bell et al 1993; Hite, 1996; Nkomo 1988) to explore similarities and differences between the experiences of women refugee managers and the experiences of black women managers. The writings of black women in the UK focus on their experience of racism in relation to white colleagues and institutional structures and cultures (Bravette 1996; Davidson 1997; Graves Dumas 1985). The research material and discussions I initiated with support group members suggested this was a strongly shared experience for both women and men within the refugee sector. However refugee women felt their experiences were specific and had differences as well as similarities to the experiences of black women managers. I described this in my report:

> The conflicts described by women managers of refugee projects are similar to those experienced by women managers outside refugee communities. However within refugee community organisations they are given a particular edge and meaning by the specific histories, politics and cultures of the communities that they serve and to which they belong. Their inter-actions with colleagues and service users inevitably takes on an emotional loading from the traumatic life experiences and support needs of individuals within refugee communities (Evelyn Oldfield Unit 1975, and 1997; Hollander 1997), some of which may also be part of their personal experience. (Evelyn Oldfield 1998, p. 7)

The refugee women managers' support group was trying to create a safe reflective space where a counter-cultural reality could be explored and experienced. In order to use this

space they had to resist pressures to devote every available moment to their organisations that were delivering badly needed services to refugee communities. There were no cultural models which justified women taking time out for relaxation or leisure let alone reflective practices, whereas men were expected to 'chew quat for hours' or sit together drinking coffee over discussion and decision making (1998: 21). Reflective space for these women was a luxury that had no cultural referent to support it.

These women managers were asserting their lived experience/s as both 'other than' and 'equally valid' to predominant male discourses and practices about leadership within their refugee communities. In my report I drew upon Western research on the specificity of women's experiences of management to lend solidarity and validity to their experience. However as discussion showed at the seminar on 'compassionate leadership', both men and women within refugee communities were also defending their identities as minorities against attack and erosion. In this context first generation women in refugee organisations were under contradictory pressures to hold traditional gender roles and to be effective managers. Some seminar participants felt that the second generation of young women and men were renegotiating their gender identifies, and discussed the need to support them in finding elements from their traditional cultures which they might transfer into their current context.

In the research report I suggested that if research were action and inquiry orientated, it could widen involvement in addressing these conflicts. It could offer opportunities for exploring what is at stake for women and for men in different communities, and offer a greater choice of strategies for individual managers in their negotiation of multiple roles and complex realities (Marshall 1995). I suggested that inter-generational dialogue could be built into this process to contribute to debates around cultural assimilation and identity. The relevant research findings from Western research could be critically explored for their value in the dialogue that could open up (1998: 22).

Re-inscribing my own voice

I have said that in writing the research report I tried to convey the active process of sense-making in which my research subjects were engaged. In this final section of my case study I describe this process more fully.

While I was able to refer explicitly to my research subjects' sense making process within the text of my research report, the positivist approach which was the basis of my consultancy contract, meant that I was unable to refer to my own interpretative process. In order to work with the data in a way which would give it validity within the terms of the contract, and retain my integrity as a feminist action researcher I made a series of choices.

First, to allow for ambiguity in the ways in which gender difference in being managers was understood by my research subjects. In the process of working with the data I found myself identifying with the sense of shifting realities and meaning which the women were expressing, within a framework which recognised the dominance of male values and discourses in the world of organisations in which they moved. I tried to articulate and capture something of the ways in which the women who took part in the discussions were acting as researchers, engaging in an active process to explore different ways of making meaning from their experiences but without losing sight of the reality of institutionalised power structures. This felt different to seeking clear definitions or consensus in my reading of their material, or avoiding ambiguity in how relations of power were interpreted and enacted, an approach I might have taken before I had been introduced to human inquiry (Reason 1988 and 1994; Marshall 1992; 1995).

Secondly, as I have said, I set out to produce a report that would open up safe spaces for dialogue between women and men, and between women with different voices. This felt very different from writing something that would polarise further, or cement oppositional stances. In order to do so I used the notion of 'doing gender' developed by feminist writers (Frye 1983; Gherardi 1995; Zimmerman and West 1991):

> 'The ways we act as women and men and the ways we act towards women and men mould our bodies and minds to the shape of subordination and dominance'. (Frye 1983, p. 34, quoted in Zimmerman and West 1991, p. 33

According to this view, gender relations are not only shaped by external factors such as organisational practices, and male behaviours and expectations, but are constructed through interactions in which women as well as men are actively engaged. In chapter 8 I show how my approach was informed by critical engagement with this literature.

Finally, I decided to try to make my own voice explicit, using 'I ' instead of the third person and making reference to my own sense making process. I wanted to try to make transparent my own engagement in a dialogue with the material, and to find a way of doing so which would not detract from the focus on the women refugee managers' material. This was in response to a growing feeling of unease, as my own engagement with the material deepened. I felt increasingly more keenly the disjuncture between my own engagement and the requirement to write something for an audience for whom the presence of the author's voice would be interpreted as reducing the validity and credibility of the content. To resolve this I drafted a new section for the introduction to the report:

> *As a white woman who is not a refugee this has raised a number of challenging political and methodological issues for me. Would I find a way of enabling the material to take its own form, find its own coherence, without supplanting it with my own beliefs and concerns? How could I use my own experience as a woman who has worked in a number of roles to promote women's equality within public and voluntary sector organisations, and as a researcher familiar with the body of literature on women managers, to add validity to the material I had been given, without giving it a form which it actually did not have? How could the publication give due credit to the women who had met over a period of a year, been through a painful process of exploration and sharing, without losing my own voice and contribution?*
>
> *I have sought to approach the material I have been given with respect for its integrity without losing my own, and to open up rather than close off spaces for further exploration and dialogue. My approach has been one of inquiry, and this has meant that I have chosen to use research material to pose questions rather than to point to answers or solutions (Marshall 1995). As well as being my preferred style, this seemed appropriate given the limited opportunity for direct face to face discussion with the women who had contributed their material for me to work with. As I read and interacted with the material key themes emerged; I have organised the material around these. At times the material suggested different readings; I found myself returning to it and approaching it differently over a period of time. I have tried to reflect this in my use of the material in the body of the report. Themes overlap and because of this section headings may appear somewhat arbitrary. I have tried to convey a sense of evolving meaning for the women who took part in the discussions as well as their need to make a statement*

about their lived experiences as they cross cultural, gender and organisational boundaries to create new identities as women managers.

In offering this text I had wanted to convey something of the politics of my approach to the data in the text. This was however inconsistent with the positivist frame of the research project and edited out of the text by my client. Paradoxically my writing was framed as the voice of objectivity.

The gesture of writing myself into the research and of having this rejected did serve a useful purpose for me. It pushed me into embarking on further cycles of my own inquiry, and into creating a space to engage more explicitly with the methodological and political issues raised. I became more aware of the need to work explicitly with my own inner world need for recognition, and how this might interface in generative or degenerative ways with similar needs from my clients. I determined to explore the ethical and political dilemmas raised in the process of this exploration.

In writing this case study I explored how generative use of empathy enabled me to engage closely with the experiences of my research subjects. I also suggested that close identification with the anger expressed by women in the research data fuelled my challenge to my client to name me as author. My unease with the positivist research approach required by my client and rejected attempt to resolve this, should have warned me to hold onto and separate my interests and needs from the research contract. However at this point my own unmet desire for accreditation and professional recognition made it harder for me to honour the constraints of my research contract and to act as the anonymous channel for my clients which would have met their needs.

During the many cycles of reflection, discussion and negotiation in which I engaged in this inquiry, I worked with my own rage and confusion in order to arrive at an analysis of the politics of the conflict with my client and of my part in it. In the process I discovered an ontological basis for my commitment to making my interpretative voice explicit within my inquiry, and in this sense to action inquiry as a method. In doing so I have cleared the ground for more mutually productive potential alliances with my co-researchers of the future.

Red Thread 2

When Feminist Collaboration Breaks Down

In this second Red Thread I reappraise the ethical and political dilemmas I experienced in my first case study.

The consultancy contract that my client and I negotiated was framed as a political intervention on behalf of the group of refugee women managers that she had convened. Thus the contract between us was based on both political and business interests.

As the consultancy progressed my client and I met regularly to discuss the research and shared personal and professional experience. We established a mutually supportive relationship that addressed the effects on individuals of gender discrimination as well as strategies for challenging male power in working environments. As this relationship of mutual support developed, the business contract receded. Only at the point when it became clear that I was not to be named as author in the publication did I experience conflict of interests. At this point tensions opened up between the business contract, our shared political objectives for this piece of work, and our shared personal stake in the project.

Initially I framed this conflict as an extension of the political intervention that the women refugee managers and my client had initiated. Positioning myself alongside my client, I set out to discuss the issues with her strategically. In response my client made it clear that at this point our interests diverged. Getting organisational support for the project had been difficult and exposing for her. She had previously made representations on behalf of consultants who had asked to be named as authors on publications and been refused; this was organisational policy and not negotiable.

The conflict that then arose related to putting my own voice back into the text in an independent publication. At this point the collaborative relationship we had established broke down; we entered into a legal conflict in which my voice became that of my individual business and professional interests, and my client's voice that of her

organisation. Feminist collaboration had been replaced by a conflict in which I was positioned as pursuing my individual business interests, and she acted as a representative of the male authority that we had jointly challenged from a feminist perspective.

Why did I feel such necessity to put my own voice back into the text, and to publish in my own name elsewhere? I had fulfilled my contract, resolving methodological challenges and forgoing my legal right to be named as author of the publication. What was at stake for me that could not be contained either within the consultancy relationship or by calling on my individual resources?

My client and I were both acting from political passion to challenge the consistent undervaluing of women's contributions to organisations. This shaped the nature of our collaboration, and in my case shaped my approach to the research data.

In chapter 2 I introduced the notion of 'passionate' or 'connected' knowing (Belenky et al 1986; Clinchy 1996). In this form of knowing, the knowing subject uses herself as an instrument of understanding, engaging deeply with other persons while maintaining a sense of her self as distinct. In contrast 'separated knowing' is based on positivist epistemological conventions, in which the knower retains her separateness and relates to the known as subject to object (Clinchy 1996). My account of how I approached the research data describes how I used myself as an instrument to interpret the experiences of my research subjects. In using the skills associated with 'connected knowing' I felt I had put something of myself into the report which I wanted to be acknowledged, and which was identified with the experience of my research subjects. However acknowledgement of the presence of my voice in the text would have breached the conventions of separated knowing within which it was to be validated. Acknowledgement as author would have provided symbolic representation of the part I had played. However when this was also withheld, I experienced pain similar to that described by my research subjects, and lost my ability to maintain a separate sense of myself.

At the point where my client made it clear that she could not agree to my research paper going forward, I felt that the shared political and personal stakes on which our collaboration was based had in some way been betrayed.

However this collaboration was bounded by constraints set by the organisation in which the consultancy contract was situated. In this environment feminist political collaboration

could be sustained only up to a point, and when I pushed beyond it was replaced by a conflict constructed by her organisation in terms of opposing professional and business interests.

In chapter 6 I introduced the term 'tempered radical' to refer to conflicting loyalties which must be held in tension by individuals who are both committed to their organisation and who carry beliefs which are at odds with those enacted in them. Meyerson and Scully (1995) who developed the term describe these conflicts thus:

> As 'insiders' they play a vital role in organisation transformation. These individuals must develop strategies for resisting pressures to forfeit one side of themselves or another. They must carry ambivalence in their affiliations, while maintaining clarity about their attachments and identity (1995: 586)

If I had framed the collaboration between my client and I as one between tempered radicals from the outset of this project, I might have been better equipped to maintain clarity about the multiple layers of our working alliance, and the constraints set by the business contract. I would have invited her to consider together how to enact our shared political and personal stakes in the project, and tried to separate the inner work necessary to separate my use of my self as instrument for connected knowing from my individual desire for affirmation. However it was through the inquiry journey I subsequently made that I developed the practices which would have better equipped me to carry this through.

Within my inquiry the conflict played a useful purpose in putting me in touch with long accumulated anger at being undervalued for my professional expertise, and for the undervaluing of women's equality work. In the following two case studies I explore how this emerged as a theme from clients, and how I developed inquiry practices which enabled me to hold in balance my need for affirmation in my consultancy projects with an assessment of appropriateness in relation to context.

Chapter 10

Case Study 2

The Country of 'Effective Local Partnerships' Recognition between Women

Introduction

This second case study explores collaboration and my consultancy role in the transnational project, Effective Local Partnerships (ELP).

I explore the tensions I experienced as I moved between three different worlds: the organisations which sponsored ELP; my internal world of subjectivity, emotion and felt experience; and the project world created by women participating in ELP. I describe the challenges that arose for me from these tensions and how I negotiated and conceptualised them through my inquiry.

In the following sections I introduce the ELP project, describe my inquiry methodology for this case study, and introduce my inquiry findings. My findings are in two sections. The first describes how I experienced and negotiated tensions between enabling collaborative working and claiming individual accreditation for my consultancy. The second is concerned with how I developed a methodology that enabled learning to take place and how I conceptualised this in terms that met the requirements of sponsoring organisations.

At the core of this case study are challenges that confronted feminist consultants and colleagues as we moved across thresholds between the worlds that we created as we developed new knowledge and practice and the organisational worlds within which we enacted these. In a further cycle of inquiry, I conceptualise these challenges and the associated skills for working with them as core to feminist consultancy (chapter 12).

An Introduction to the Effective Local Partnerships (ELP) Project

This section provides a brief overview of project activities and describes my consultancy role and approach. Finally I introduce key challenges which are explored in this case study.

Effective Local Partnerships (ELP) was a three-year project led by London Borough of Lewisham and funded by the European Commission[i]. The aim of ELP was to develop transferable methods for mainstreaming gender equality.

'Gender Mainstreaming' is a term first introduced by the European Commission and is now widely used by development agencies and by national, local and regional governments. It has been widely promoted in Great Britain by the Equal Opportunities Commission and is defined by the European Commission as 'the systematic consideration of the differences between the conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all Community policies, at the point of planning, implementation and evaluation'.

The ELP project was funded by an EU programme designed to promote gender-mainstreaming projects. The project brought together organisations working to promote women's equality in a range of different sectors and countries to develop practical methods for mainstreaming gender equality within their fields of policy and practice. Each national partner organisation in the transnational project was to work with local partners in their chosen field, to develop and evaluate context-specific gender mainstreaming interventions. With their partners in the transnational project, they would evaluate the methods they had developed, and select practices that might be 'transferable' to other contexts. Through a joint process of evaluation and piloting, the transnational partners would produce 'transferable tools for gender mainstreaming'. A full account of the project and of project results is given in the ELP publication (Page 2000) and on the ELP Website http//:www. 4thapelp.com.

Partner organisations were selected by the London local authority that initiated the project. They were varied in the sectors in which they were active and in their approaches to women's equality work. Individuals who took part in transnational activities also varied in levels of experience of transnational working. All except one were women and all except

one were salaried. Partner organisations were: an Irish trade union centre for the unemployed; a Dutch provincial women's council; an Italian national public sector trade union federation. They worked at national, regional or local level on women's equality issues. All were new to the concept of 'gender mainstreaming' and wanted to use it to build on their existing work.

The lead partner was responsible for reporting to the project funders within the European Commission and for project management and co-ordination. She employed three consultants to support her: a project manager, based in Italy; an evaluator based in Ireland; and a methodology consultant, myself. The project manager was responsible for communication between partners; she produced regular newsletters in three languages, and developed a project web site and discussion board. The evaluator's approach was formative; she provided regular feedback on process and project direction at transnational meetings, and worked closely with me to conceptualise the project methodology and in drafting the project publication. From the second year of the project, consultants and lead partner worked increasingly closely as a team at transnational meetings and in producing the project publication. An advisory board made up of representatives of national and European policy making bodies acted as a resource for policy information and as a sounding board for strategy development throughout the project.

My role on the project was 'methodology consultant'. I co-designed the project proposal, with the project leader, and during the project worked closely with her and the other consultants to ensure project milestones and objectives were met. I designed and facilitated transnational meetings of partners. In the final year I took the lead role in conceptualising the ELP methodology and in writing the publication that was the final product of the project.

Transnational project activities consisted of working sessions for representatives of partner organisations. These sessions took place twice a year for three years and were hosted by each partner in turn. The work method I developed for these meetings aimed to enable partners to exchange and develop practical initiatives to achieve gender mainstreaming at local level. In facilitating the meetings I balanced partners' need to tell each other about their work in their local contexts with the need for a process through which to develop shared evaluation criteria.

Through their participation in the project, partners did develop new gender mainstreaming practices in their local contexts and methods which were transferable to different country

and organisational contexts. The 'product' of the transnational partnership was a publication which describes the gender mainstreaming methods developed by ELP partners, and provides a 'Toolkit' for others to use (Page 2000a). This publication was launched at a high profile conference in London hosted by the lead partner.

There were significant challenges throughout the project. These concerned finding ways of working which honoured diversity between partners; building sufficient common ground to work with; and finding ways of representing the project which gained institutional support in environments. In facilitating the transnational meetings I aimed to build relationships between partners that would motivate them to engage in joint work with each other. I set out to build a dynamic transnational partnership within which partners would move beyond information exchange into joint conceptual thinking and development of new practice. This was more ambitious than the usual EU transnational project meetings where partners simply reported on their country specific local practice.

I initiated a joint process to write the project publication and to conceptualise the project methodology. Through this process I arrived at a stronger sense of my individual consultancy approach and methods. It was not until I came to write the handbook that I was able to conceptualise as a methodology the way in which I had been working, and to show how this was based on the action learning principle of learning through cycling between reflection and action (McGill and Beaty 1992).

The work of ELP had many positive practical **outcomes,** which are summarised in the ELP reports and publication. In the project evaluation and in discussions at transnational meetings participants identified results that included personal and professional development as well as organisational initiatives. These are described in *The Power of Women Affirming Women*, a later section of this case study.

There is no doubt that objectives were met both by partners within their local contexts and within the transnational project. Despite this establishing legitimacy for project achievements was not so easy. The organisational environments in which participants worked increasingly favoured short-term results and did not prioritise women's equality in either their policy work or their resourcing strategies. Within the European Commission gender equality work was increasingly under scrutiny and political attack. This was a challenging environment which to work and created pressures on relationships within the ELP project.

The programme from which ELP was funded was the only specific gender equality programme within the EU, and was itself under scrutiny. While the ELP project had been approved in principle as a three-year programme, funding had to be approved on a year on basis and was subject to evidence demonstrating that the previous year's results had been achieved. Requirements for financial reporting were strict and detailed. Representatives of the programme expressed enthusiasm for the emphasis on learning and exchange between partners at our transational meetings, but were uneasy about the project methodology's orientation to process rather than to products that they were accustomed to seeing as project outputs. They passed their anxiety on to the project leader. Much of this tension was enacted within our consultancy relationship.

In my inquiry I tracked how these challenges impacted on relationships between women within the project; and how they were enacted between myself and the project leader. In this case study I select from this material to describe how I worked with these tensions, and how I tried to develop and maintain a space within which women were able to value, sustain and learn from each other.

Methodology

This case study is a selective account of a multi-levelled inquiry. My inquiry activities consisted of cycles of action and reflection, undertaken on my own and with others over a period of three years. I moved from reflective practices on my consultancy activities, in which I drew from earlier cycles of my life process inquiry (chapters 3 and 4), into inquiry based discussion with others. In the following I describe the layering of inquiry cycles through which this case study was produced:

- Inquiry as life process: cycles of reflection on action through which I considered how I was taking up my role as feminist consultant on the project, issues of identity and of accreditation which arose as I moved between business, feminist and political frames of reference. Emotional and experiential knowing were my primary source of data.
- Inquiry within my consultancy: cycles of reflection and action on my own and with colleagues to develop, test and enact the project methodology for transfer of learning. Practical knowing was my primary focus.
- Writing as inquiry, generating propositional knowing: in the final phase of the project I worked with the evaluator and lead partner to conceptualise the

method for exchange and transfer of learning which I had developed, to draft the project publication and to engage participants in discussion of how to represent the project 'product'.

Crafting this case study, selecting from material from previous cycles in order to illustrate multiple levels of engagement in my inquiry and my use of these inquiry methods; inviting and working with feedback on drafts from my supervisor, members of CARPP inquiry group, and my client on the project. In redrafting and crafting I sought to represent how I worked with these multiple layers of inquiry and how I cycled between different forms of knowing as my inquiry developed.

In writing this case study my initial intention was to tell a story of achievement as consultant and reflective practitioner. Instead I found myself writing the story of my struggle to negotiate the tension between collaborative working and my need for individual accreditation as a consultant in the project. In discovering the space between my intended narrative and what emerged I found my inquiry.

I began these cycles of writing inquiry immediately after the final ELP conference. My positive experience at the conference shaped my initial account. Powered by energy from this successful public event and by the experience of mutual affirmation expressed at the evaluation day, tension between my inner and the outer worlds was acute as I relived the story of my consultancy on the project. These tensions between the public image I would normally project to clients and colleagues as a feminist consultant and my experience of the lived and gendered reality between women are explored in my case study.

My writing was driven by felt emotion; holding my inquiry position required me to both 'feel' the emotion, and to work from a position of sufficient detachment to exercise judgement in how to use and interpret it within the context of my inquiry. Clinchy describes her and her colleagues' difficulty in establishing how the women who contributed to their research used the procedures they described as 'connected knowing' (Clinchy 1996 p. 229). Her description of using the self as an instrument of knowing and of engaging deeply with the 'object' of knowing convey key elements of my inquiry practices.

As I wrote I listened 'with the third ear' (Reik 1948) to the music behind my own words, alert for signs of censoring or of imbalance, noticing which parts of myself were more readily coming into voice. I stayed attuned to bodily and emotional sensation, engaging with my inner voices, being alert to changes in energy level such as sensations of vitality

or exhaustion. Where sensations of vitality were strong I read them as signs of being on the right track; where there was lack of energy I probed for signs of resistance, of inner censoring. Sometimes responding to these shifts of energy opened up a new angle. At the beginning and end of this case study, for example, I introduced different voices into my text, inviting them to introduce new data and to challenge my previous account and analysis. In this process I kept in mind the notion of inquiry as life process, the sense of life issues and of my inquiry being 'empty ' of 'full' of meaning drawn from current life issues (Marshall 1992,1999).

In the process of my writing different voices emerged and jostled for position, each with their own story to tell and audiences to address. In this final version of my case study I use italics to represent these voices in the text. The first voice spoke as a consultant, addressing an audience of clients and colleagues; she spoke in a language of roles, of tasks, of achievements, and was strongly disapproving of the second. The second voice spoke from my inner world, seeming to address an audience of intimate friends, speaking of passion, relationship and of identity between women. I had the sense sometimes that she had ambitions to be writing a novel, in contrast to a consultant's textbook. These two voices spoke from positions associated with the private world of women and the public spaces designed and defined by men. It has taken courage to keep the space open between them, in order to allow the third voice to emerge, narrator and holder of the vision for the overall case study. At points in the case study, I allow the first and second voices to 'take the microphone' to tell their story.

In writing this inquiry I recognised that an ability to work with these tensions creatively was the defining quality of my feminist consultancy. I sought to express them explicitly in the verbal content of this case study, in the sequencing of voices and narratives and their analysis, but also to convey their quality through your experience of reading the text.

In reading this case study, I ask that you watch for evidence that I worked consistently with these tensions, and kept the spaces open between them.

Competing voices

The three different voices I am about to introduce emerged spontaneously as I wrote my first draft of this chapter. Through allowing them to speak to each other I moved this case study from an account of consultancy and inquiry work completed, to a further cycle of

inquiry conducted through the process of writing. Through working with conflicting feelings and voices as they surfaced, and drawing from reflections conducted with colleagues during the consultancy process, I 'found' the purpose of this case study within my wider inquiry. I became familiar with the characteristics of these voices, and associated them with different ways of being I adopted in relation to others in work-based and social contexts. These were the voices in which I spoke when in consultant mode and the voices I used with friends with whom I shared the passions of my inner world. They were in this sense appropriate to specific contexts, relationships, and ways in which I constructed my identity. Inviting them to speak to each other, in the context of this inquiry, opened up a space for 'doing consultancy' differently, for reconstructing my consultancy identity.

In the dialogue that follows, the purpose of this case study within my inquiry emerges:

> Consultant's voice
> In this case study I will focus on how I developed a transferable methodology based on inquiry and action learning, how I enabled a process of learning and exchange between women working on equalities issues in different contexts, and how I conceptualised the methodology developed by the transnational project. My consultancy role within the project, consultancy relationship with the project leader, and to a lesser extent with other consultants, and partners, will be a focus of inquiry in the case study.
>
> *Inner world voice*
> *Stop right there! Isn't that rather grandiose – and dull? You make it sound as if you did it all single-handed! And aren't you going to put in the late night sharing of our lives, over dinners in Dublin, Delft and Rome? The competition, the love, the power struggles, and our shared passion for the work? Of my figuring out what to wear and how to look the part – and what part to play? Of moments of collaboration and of asserting leadership; of knowing when it was right to make a claim for recognition? Where should I begin?*
>
> Consultant's voice
> Well all right then; but it all depends who are you talking to – and for what purposes! If you want to be marketable and impress potential clients don't expect them to be interested in women having fun together! They want to see a product – and that means gender neutral! And they want to hire someone who can deliver - preferably single handedly! But since this is an inquiry, let's try this:

In this case study I will focus on how I worked with gender role and identity issues which arose for me in relation to colleagues in the final phase of the ELP project. I will describe how through a process of authoring the ELP publication, I came to understand and conceptualise the methods I had used and my contribution to the project more clearly. Intertwined through the story of the results I achieved is the story of my lived experience of this process, in relation to other women with key roles on the project. I will explore key issues that arose in these relationships, and their significance for my developing sense of my professional identity.

Inner world voice
Well.....That's better! But watch out - remember you promised to let the others read this! Don't say anything you will be ashamed of - no false claims now and no boasting! And no self-pity or self-abnegation either!

Inquiry voice
This inquiry is for me – not just them! Isn't this an illustration of what my inquiry is about: the gendered nature of knowledge and internalised as well as external barriers to asserting the value of women's knowing in environments in which it is neither recognised nor valued?

As I began to write, the desire to engage more deeply with these different voices became stronger. I felt daunted and exhilarated - and alert to internal censors at work. Already they were gathering strength; and continuing with my inquiry felt increasingly dangerous and exposing. I wanted to speak with the voice of success, of achievement and adventure; but to acknowledge others too, and to speak of vulnerabilities and the darker side of women 's relationships. Somehow I must maintain the tension between the inner and outer world voices, using inquiry to keep the space open between them and to prevent one voice from drowning out the others.

Inquiry Findings

My inquiry findings are in two sections.

In **Findings 1, Women Valuing Women in Public and Private Spaces,** I explore how I used inquiry to negotiate tensions between my need for individual accreditation and my desire to sustain and validate collaborative working relationships.

In **Findings 2, Developing a Secure Base for Women's Transnational Learning: The Making of Feminist Methodology** I explore the methodological and epistemological challenges I experienced in facilitating transfer of learning within the project, conceptualising how it worked, and presenting it in the public sphere.

In **The Country of ELP** I introduce a different voice into the text, which speaks of care and passion in relationships between key players on the project. I assert these qualities as core to my inquiry, and to the enactment of power, leadership and collaboration on the ELP project.

In **Conclusions,** I relate the inquiry conducted through this case study to my own developmental process.

Findings 1

Women valuing women in public and private spaces

In this section I explore how issues of public legitimation and accreditation were lived out in relationships between ELP partners and between partners and myself as project consultant. The section is divided into three subsections; each explores these issues through a key moment in affirming the value of project and accrediting contributions to it. These take place at the final conference, in authoring and negotiating accreditation for authorship of the final publication, and at the final evaluation day.

In the inquiry a mirroring emerges between my desires and needs and some of those voiced by women in consultant and client / partner roles. Different voices intertwine as women speak of their desire for public legitimation, and articulate the sense of affirmation they received through their work with each other on the project. I show how I used inquiry to explore how these issues emerged for me within my consultancy role, and how I invited colleagues and my client to help me resolve them in ways that honoured our joint work as well as my individual contribution to it.

Accrediting feminist consultancy and collaboration

The ELP final conference was widely publicised and high profile. Designed by the lead partner and myself with input from the project evaluator, it aimed to give participants a flavour of the quality of our work and of the methods we had developed, to launch the final product, a publication, and to inspire them to use it. Speakers were selected to draw it to the attention of the European Commission, national bodies concerned with gender equality, and key personnel within the lead organisation. For partners and consultants on the project team it was an opportunity to profile their work and make useful contacts.

In the paragraph below, I describe a critical moment in my experience of the conference. To convey the quality of lived experience of this moment I speak in a different voice, the inner world voice of drama and passion introduced earlier in this chapter. In the analysis that follows I use this description to illustrate and introduce the multi-levelled tensions which I held together as a feminist consultant on the project. I explore these tensions further in the rest of the chapter.

> *As the moment drew closer for my presentation at the end of the conference I shuffled my notes; ten pages of near illegible handwriting put together during the day. My brief was to reflect on the themes of discussion and interactions at the conference, in order to illustrate the methodology we had developed and the nature of our work on the three-year project. I had 15 minutes, and unlike previous speakers, no power point props. I was confident but nervous. My name went up on the huge digital screen. Lavish bouquets of flowers matched the multi-coloured publication front cover and conference logo: 'Patterns of Change'. My Italian orange linen suit, worn only once before, in which I felt rather too shoulder padded, heterosexual and managerial to be quite me, seemed right for the occasion. I was on!*
>
> *I set aside my notes and spoke with passion without pausing for breath: weaving together fragments of conversation with individuals I remembered; acknowledging interactions and exchange which had meant something to me; trying to convey something of the quality of lived experience, the interactions through which we had influenced, inspired and sustained each other. I named action learning as a method, and used metaphors to which I knew partners would relate to describe it. Being myself as I had been in role in the project, I urged all to use the publication*

to 'taste' the quality of exchange we had experienced for themselves, through their participation at the conference. Making eye contact with partners and consultants I could see they were listening and nodding and I felt great! I had found my element - a medium at last for bringing myself more fully into the public arena.

In my inquiry voice I can say that this is a story of how it felt to introduce playfulness, passion and politics into my public 'organisation consultant' voice, to taste a moment of being fully present in the public arena. It also signposts complex dilemmas concerning public representation of professional competence and authority in relation to gender, passion, and sexuality.

In the following paragraphs I unpack some of these dilemmas for my inquiry. I use italics to indicate that these reflections concern a part of me that is different and separate from my work persona:

The Italian orange suit had associations for me with public images of senior women managers: glamorous and attention loving. It also had associations with Italy that spoke both to my own life experience of passion and adventure, and to my association with the project – I had bought it after a successful project meeting in Rome. I felt as if I was in disguise, definitely not recognisable as a lesbian feminist or activist, 'in drag' and playfully so. Playing at 'mainstreaming' for the occasion, I was aware of entering risky territory. Daring to 'do' gender - and sexuality - differently; I was hoping to look the part, but also aware I was unsure how I might be perceived by colleagues, who were not used to seeing me in this mode. I also was nervous of feeling in some way self-silenced, disconnected from my political identity.

In my presentation I wanted to find a way of asserting both my own individuality and the value of joint achievements. With this double objective in mind I felt powerful and fully myself, present in the moment. I was acting as a channel, but also accrediting my part. I knew I was performing, but felt I was acting as spokesperson not only for myself but also for all of us. I was speaking in a voice which reached deep into my being, yet also reached into our shared passion, and out to others; holding attention, and using it to reflect back to the audience our collective achievements.

Afterwards, colleagues and partners told me that they had received my presentation in a way that felt positive and affirming for them. My feeling of empowerment was not just in the speaking, but in these interactions. The suit had worked for me as a statement of readiness to claim a place 'in the mainstream' for myself and for the work I was representing.

Described as a moment of individual experience, my sense of legitimacy and power was firmly embedded in relationships with co-workers. It asserted the power of authority in relationship rather than in individual attributes as a basis for leadership. It was gendered and ambivalent in sexuality and identity; both passionate and task focussed. It signalled the complex and embodied nature of issues around leadership and identity for women (Hall 1989; Sheppard 1989).

Feminist research has shown how women in gender mixed organisations often manage their self-image and presentation with fine political judgement. In one research study on the image and self-image of women managers, in-depth interviews were conducted with fifty men and women managers and professionals in Canadian organisations (Sheppard 1989). Responses suggested a number of ways in which sexuality was used to promote and maintain existing arrangements of power and control within their organisations. Women were faced with a series of dilemmas: being female was problematic; women were unpredictably seen as being sexual rather than organisational. In response they adopted strategies for gender management, yet had always to be vigilant in protecting their positions.

In a study of the experiences of lesbians in organisations, researchers suggested that lesbianism was an opposing reality, a refusal to be available as 'other' within male narratives of self. Both strategies of disclosure and of non-disclosure had dangers; lesbians were caught in the crossfire of conflicting cultural and subcultural imperatives.

> The strategies lesbians used to manoeuvre their way through this thicket of contradictions reveals that the old reductionist notion of 'coming out' is not an act, but rather a never ending and labyrinthian process of decision and indecision, of nuanced and calculated presentations as well as impulsive and inadvertent revelations - a process as shifting as the context in which it occurs.
> (Hall 1989: 137)

The women in these studies had to exercise vigilance in relation to female and male colleagues. They had to challenge social gender and sexual stereotypes sufficiently to assert their professional competence, while remaining sufficiently within the bounds of acceptability to protect their status and working relationships. Lesbians who disclosed their sexuality risked having a new career thrust upon them of 'representing their category' (Goffman 1963:26) or of being tokenised by heterosexual workers (Hall 1989:183). These environments were fluid and unpredictable. There was no strategy which could be guaranteed to work; resolution was achieved if at all in moments, and might quickly disintegrate.

In my story I show myself in one such moment of resolution in relation to my experience of tensions associated with being a feminist lesbian consultant in relation to self, feminist colleagues, and conference participants. At this moment the credibility of the project was at stake and had to be demonstrated in terms of the lead organisation's values. I experienced these tensions both in relation to my personal gender and sexual identity and in relation to my feminist colleagues. I needed to demonstrate both my allegiance to collaborative relationships which we had built within the project, and my individual contribution as methodology consultant and facilitator. I wanted to demonstrate the value of our work both on the basis of outputs valued by the organisations represented at the conference and on the basis of the values and the process of learning and development experienced by project participants. In addition I wanted to convey the quality and value of my work to potential clients without betraying the collaborative working relationships we had constructed.

At an ontological level I had brought passion and sexuality into my 'consultancy' identity in an environment that favoured bullet pointed presentations and measured voice tone. I had broken with organisational stereotypes by adopting an appearance not associated with 'lesbian feminist'. In this sense I had refused to enact 'difference' by adopting a public 'lesbian' identity, a strategy which would have increased the risk of being marginalised as an individual, and might by association have marginalised the project (Hall 1989). I had succeeded in describing the project achievements and my own, and had found a form to convey how we had worked together which expressed something of what I had brought to my consultancy role. I had described this in terms which project participants could recognise and identify with, and which seemed to add value to the other organisations present.

The sense of empowerment I experienced at this moment signalled convergence and resolution of tensions that I experienced at other times.
Consultants and lead partner were all actors in this process. Each spoke in her organisational role to accredit the collective achievement of project participants and each also spoke to her own contribution.

Feminist researchers have drawn attention to the ambivalence experienced by many women in identifying with 'heroic' representations of leadership Boucher 1997; Oseen 1997). In my story I described myself as 'mirroring' the collective achievements of the project *and* staking a claim for my individual contribution. The style in which I told my story signposted tensions between a desire to represent my individual contribution to the project as 'heroic', and my desire to protect and honour the collaborative elements of leadership which I also within the project.

Individual accreditation within collaborative relationships

The lead partner and myself drew up the conference programme with assistance from the project evaluator. In planning the conference the priority was to secure legitimation and profile for the project both within the lead organisation and externally. Working towards this objective raised my own anxieties associated with reaching the end of the project. These concerned how I should market the skills and methods I had used on the project in the future and how my role would be described or accredited at the event. Underneath these were more painful inner-world doubts about recognition, at a deeper level, from my female colleagues. How could I avoid repeating my recent experience of being present at the launch of the publication I had written and not being accredited (chapter 9)? How could I make a claim for myself on an occasion when the focus should be on the project and its partners?

This time I addressed the issues by inviting the project leader to explore these issues with me when we were planning the conference. In response she invited me to make a presentation at the event which would model and describe the project methodology and the facilitation role I had played. At the beginning of the conference she described the contribution of each of her consultants using text agreed with us in advance:

> *Margaret helped me to draw up the original project and offered me regular consultation and methodology advice throughout the project. Through an action*

learning approach she designed and facilitated the transnational meetings to ensure we fulfilled our aims and objectives. She drafted the initial text for the handbook and after we read it, considered it and mauled it during our last meeting, and she still had the energy to redraft and edit.

In reflecting on Margaret's role I would say that she 'held the vision' for us all. In those days when it felt like we would never get anywhere she was able to find a way of taking things forward. She managed some very difficult individual and transnational sessions, not shying away from conflict but helping myself and all of us to learn from it. A great skill, thank you!
ELP Project leader

This description affirmed how we had worked on the project and the values we had enacted for. In making it part of her presentation she made a bridge between the values enacted in the project and the register of values in her organisational world, and enabled me to bring a different voice to my presentation at the conference.

In earlier cycles of my inquiry I had explored with the project leader how we enacted our consultancy relationship (chapter 6). I illustrated how we used second person inquiry skills to explore the tension between care and challenge, power and leadership. In this and subsequent discussions we acknowledged that we had both drawn on inner world skills as well as skills related to our organisational roles to manage conflicting demands within our working relationship. We had used inquiry practices to negotiate a potentially explosive area for women, as indicated by contributors A and E who I also interviewed in this previous cycle of my inquiry (chapter 6; appendices 3 and 4). The meta-discussion sustained through my inquiry added a level of communication that enabled me to broach discussion which would have been more difficult within the consultancy frame and which was not possible within my first case study (Chapter 9, and Red Thread 2).

At the end of the project I discussed with members of the editorial board how authorship of the handbook should be attributed in the publication. On the basis of this discussion I felt I had permission to make a claim for authorship without misrepresenting our collaborative approach to drafting. On the strength of this I opened discussion with the lead partner. In response she stated her intention to name each contributor on documents to which they had contributed in the pack. She invited me to circulate a form of words which described my contribution; I circulated a claim for lead responsibility to the editorial group members for comment and invited others to make suggestions to ensure adequate

acknowledgement of their own contribution. I went on holiday, suspended my emotional investment in the outcome, and let go of my expectations.

On my return, the lead partner and I met with the graphic designers. As the design took shape, and I finalised the text I could see her confidence in the product increase. Finally she let me know she had made her own decision to make me the named author associated with the ISBN number. I wept. It was as if through her act of recognition the skills I had brought to the project had been acknowledged. I felt 'known' at a depth that was new and deeply affirming. As if I had been given this as a gift a gift of love when I had been expecting to have to either give it up or to wrest it from others.

At this point my inner world voice says:

> *This moment of recognition had a felt quality that was healing and deeply empowering. In my inquiry voice I asked - but what is the wound that was being healed here?*

I ask my readers to hold this core question in mind, knowing I will return to it when I conceptualise feminist consultancy in chapter 12.

My inquiry practices had enabled me to shift into a position from which I negotiated a role for myself at the conference. From this position I was able to publicly affirm the value of our collaboration as well to demonstrate my individual contribution. I had moved out of a strategy of self- erasure and into self-recognition; I had claimed accreditation of my individual contribution from colleagues and had experienced a moment of healing.

Contributors to my inquiry interviews reported that in relationships between women in organisational settings individual success was often experienced as betrayal of collective identity. Individual women experienced a double bind, each course of action leading to a loss of an aspect of self as it was constructed in relation to others (chapter 6, contributors A and C). In contrast mutual accreditation by ELP participants in the public sphere implied a different possibility of maintaining a sense of self-in-relationship while also claiming individual accreditation.

In the following subsection I explore how participants described what they valued about their relationships within the project. In the chapter 12 I develop a conceptual framework for taking this further.

The Power of Women Affirming Women

The ELP project ended with an evaluation day that I helped to facilitate. Participants gave permission for me to draw from their discussions for this inquiry.

At the beginning of the day they were invited to share:

> *Something that is different for me as a result of my involvement in ELP; something I'm going to miss; and something from ELP I will take with me into the future*
> ELP evaluator

In response, they spoke of experiences that had been transformational at personal and at professional levels. Partners and consultants stated that participating had in some way enabled them to flourish.

> *I will miss, and take with me into the future the country of ELP*
> Project manager

The qualities of this 'country' emerged in discussion: participants named them as the quality of the environment in which they had been working, and the quality of relationships they had made with each other. Their collaboration had been challenging and mutually affirming; it was international, and diverse; it was political, involving knowledge of the power and role of women's organisations. One partner, a highly successful lawyer and Member of Parliament, stated:

> *I have never had so much praise for what I do!*
> ELP partner

They said that they had gained a sense of personal self worth, and a sense of the value of their work in the public sphere. Partners referred to the value of the relationships they had formed as a key aspect of the method we had developed to sustain their work:

> *The personal and professional relationships; the method of work – in groups instead of as individuals, stopping and reflecting, affirming and evaluating; the time out in different surroundings where we became very creative together.*
> ELP partner

Yet ELP partners were not in any sense lacking in self-esteem or competence, or at the beginning of their career. They were in most cases highly experienced and skilled professionals who simply did not get a sense of affirmation for their work on women's equality and who as individuals continued to be vulnerable to being devalued in their work environments. Nor had they had opportunities to reflect on their work in the company of other women who shared their commitment to women's equality. In 'the country of ELP' their relationships had bridged organisational divisions and moved between personal and professional worlds. It seemed that the sense of valuing and of being valued which partners and consultants gave each other in relationships which were built during working sessions, was precious and not something found elsewhere.

> *Inspiration, affirmation that what you are doing is OK; the knowledge that this way of working has enormous value*
> ELP partner

One partner said in a private conversation that she experienced the evaluation session as a 'slow love making with each other', a nurturing and mutually energising erotic exchange. Her remark signalled the presence of sexual energy in our working relationships, and by implication challenged the absence of reference in organisational literature to sexuality between women. Contributors to my interviews also named 'shared passion' as one of their preferred features of women working together - and two of them linked this to falling in love, or to sexual feelings.

The importance of 'mirroring' as a consultancy method, of reflecting back to women what they have achieved, was highlighted by ELP partners and consultants. Both Italian and Dutch partners linked this to evaluative inquiry: taking regular time out to reflect on their work as a way of correcting the tendency of women to impact of their actions. Interview contributor E also identified 'reflecting back achievements' as a vital consultancy method for working with women's organisations. Both she and the Dutch ELP partner stated emphatically that women consistently underestimate what they have achieved and need help to pause and 'see' the results and quality of their work. Taking time out to reflect on achievements was modelled by the method I developed for transnational project work and partners reported that as a result of experiencing its value in transational meetings they had incorporated into their practice within their local partnerships.

Some feminist psychodynamic research suggests that 'mirroring' meets women's need for a 'sense of being', but can be a potential danger as it sometimes undermines differentiation in groups (Minetti 1993). This returns me to the moment of 'healing recognition' that I experienced when accredited by the lead partner. This 'moment ' represented affirmation, but was based on recognition of separate roles and different contributions rather than on sameness. This moment was one of recognition of the 'otherness of the other' described in my literature review (chapter 8); of connection while maintaining separateness described by Buber as an I/Thou interaction which is a necessary condition for dialogue (Buber, cited in Clinchy 1996: 222).

During the three years that partners and consultants worked together we moved from a disparate set of individuals from widely differing partner organisations and countries, to a 'country' that we had created together. Participants agreed that this 'country' had been a space for reflection on action, for mutual inspiration and sustaining through exchange of good practice, for generating new ideas and practice, and for personal transformation (Page 2000b). The relationships and the method seemed to have enabled us to create an affirming and transforming environment that partners internalised to sustain personal life changes. Moreover we had succeeded in creating tools for partners and others to use in their gender mainstreaming work in organisations.

Feminist researchers celebrate the hidden passionate quality of friendship between women (Faderman 1985; Raymond 1986). More recently feminist organisation literature has begun to explore friendships between women in work settings (Andrew and Montague 1998). In organisations where validation is not to be taken for granted, these friendships have the potential to sustain political and professional identity (Wiseman 1986 cited in O'Connor 1992: Andrew and Montague 1998).

While none of this feminist literature on friendship in work settings refers specifically to erotic energy, it does talk about passion between women - a topic noticeably absent in organisation literature about sexuality and emotion in organisations (Fineman 1994; Hearn et al 1970). I suggest that erotic and sexual energy may often be present in interactions between women who work together and that this is not necessarily going to correlate to their declared sexuality. As feminist psychodynamic research suggests, recognition of the other is a decisive moment of differentiation and can be closely linked to the erotic experience (Benjamin 1990).

In her research Sinclair explored the relationship for women between sexuality, self-esteem and leadership (Sinclair 1998). Women she interviewed experienced sexual energy in a wide range of ways associated with passion, wholeness, bringing themselves more fully into their leadership role. She linked self-esteem with sexual expression, and identified the position of greatest power for women as one in which they are able to be most forthright in their sexual expression at work. Women in this position constituted their own meanings of sexuality as part of asserting themselves in leadership (168). The difficulties for women in negotiating this territory were high and required skilful management.

The sexual energy referred to at the ELP meeting, and which I experienced in the presentation I described earlier in this chapter, expressed an element of the creative energy brought to the working relationship within the project.

The 'country of ELP' which we had created was a 'secure base' in which individual participants sustained each other and their women's equality work. The organisational and political environments in which they were working were resistant to change, to gender mainstreaming and to the ways of working we had developed. Nevertheless participants generated an energy which was playful, creative, and challenging. It was characterised by a secure enough matrix of relationships between participants, within which differences could be explored, and common ground established.

In the next section I explore how we created this 'secure base', the relational skills we developed and used, and what my role was in the journey.

Findings 2

Developing a Secure Base for Women's Transnational Learning: the making of feminist methodology

This section is the second of the two narratives to which I referred in my introduction to this case study. It is the story of the part I played in creating an environment that enabled women to learn from each other across power and difference within the ELP transnational partnership. I describe the challenges that I experienced in conceptualising this process and finding a form in which to represent it as a 'product'.

The section is divided into two parts. In the first I describe how I enabled collaboration and exchange to take place between partners, drawing from knowledge located in different contexts and identities. In the second I explore the epistemological challenges of demonstrating that we had produced new practice that was transferable to other contexts, and describe how I worked with my colleagues to respond to them.

Devaluing environments, valuing women: Creating a secure enough base for collaboration between women

Transnational meetings took place twice a year over the three-year period of the project. I designed them as working sessions, aiming to meet the project milestones and to stimulate transnational exchange. It was not enough for partners to report on results achieved in their country contexts; the added value of the transnational partnership had to be experienced, articulated and demonstrated.

Partners needed to feel motivated to work together and to do so at high intensity in the short time available for each transnational meeting. These took place over two to three days, twice a year. At the first meeting differences seemed as wide as similarities. In the account below, I describe some of the challenges, and how I worked with them:

> The Dutch partners hosted the first transnational meeting. As we gathered for our first evening at the home of the Dutch lead partner in the official residence of the royal family, I noticed that I felt discomfort at the contrast between the elegant surroundings and the politics I had brought to the project. This alerted me to potential ideological differences and to differences of power and identity between partners. I became aware of how my perceptions of participants were already influencing shaping how I was relating to them. It felt essential to find a way to acknowledge our differences and what they represented to each of us, in order to find common ground.
>
> At the meeting the following day I decided to work from differences as well as similarities in order to avoid the trap of building false consensus. I was aware that political differences were likely to reflect the organisations and the constituencies that they represented, and that interactions were also likely to be shaped by their different levels of seniority within their organisations and experience of working in

transnational partnerships. I wanted to surface unspoken assumptions between partners about unequal power and access to resources, and to engage in a dialogue about how these differences would need to be addressed within the partnership.

I invited partners to explore what was unique to each and suggested this would be a starting point for joint work to develop new approaches to gender mainstreaming. This seemed affirming to partners and I spent more time than planned encouraging partners to name differences in their approaches.

During the session we acknowledged that partners were diverse in ideologies, sector, organisation and country. They differed in the amount of power they had as individuals as well as organisations, and were operating with different models of how to achieve change. They spoke different languages and had different levels of experience of transnational working. More importantly, as trade unionists, community activists, members of political parties, and local authority advisors, they were each identified with a context-specific history of equalities work in which were embedded beliefs about how to bring about change.

In the course of discussion, partners acknowledged that in forming a transnational partnership they were making collaborative relationships with agencies that they might not have considered possible or useful in their local contexts. Partners' understanding of the core concepts of 'gender mainstreaming' as well as of 'partnership' differed, and was informed by historical, political and sectoral context as well as organisational politics.

Once we had named differences between partners we struggled to arrive at a common understanding of gender mainstreaming. With the help of the evaluator we drew up a list that encompassed approaches unique to each partner. This encompassed 'top down' policy led approaches of local authorities and trade unions, and 'bottom up' activist driven approaches of women's and community based organisations. It was effectively a statement of the need for a range of approaches in order to achieve gender mainstreaming. Later this became the basis of the ELP framework for developing context specific gender mainstreaming strategies in partnerships.

In agreeing this framework, partners moved away from advocating their own approach as more legitimate than others and recognised the need for multiple strategies to achieve the necessary changes. They described this as a need for both 'bottom up' and 'top down' approaches.

At the time, I experienced this shift as a pivotal moment in the process of building the transnational partnership. For the purposes of this inquiry now it seems important to understand more of what it represented. At the time, I understood it as a statement of willingness to move out of separate individually defined contexts, into a shared territory. In adopting a common framework which included each partner's definitions of good practice, partners made a statement that affirmed the value of each other's approach. In doing so they shifted from identifying the different strategies with opposing ideological positions which had to be argued against, to a 'both/and' position (chapter 8). The organisations and sectors to which each partner organisation belonged, 'government', 'trade unions', 'community or voluntary sector', or 'women's' organisations', no longer represented potential opponents who were operating from different ideological standpoints but had become potential allies in complementary strategies for achieving common goals.

The naming of different approaches to gender mainstreaming, followed by acknowledgement of the value of each approach within the context in which it had been developed, enabled participants to take a first step towards developing a shared 'country' within they would move on to develop a common language.

Through interaction at transnational meetings, partners built relationships that cut through divisions arising from their different positioning. Through this process they began to reach a new understanding of how to become effective actors within the policy process. They could see that each used the power to which they had access from the position in which they were situated. As they came to understand each other's perspectives and approaches they began to see potential in their local contexts for cross-sectoral influence and to build alliances with partners which they had not previously considered.

In their reports to transnational meetings partners stated that these new relationships had enabled them to extend their influence, and credibility. A process of cross-fertilisation was occurring. Partners were influencing each other, trying out aspects of each other's approaches, and adding to their repertoire of skills.

This process did not follow the rather mechanistic plan for 'exchange of gender mainstreaming methods' drawn up for the funding proposal, but seemed to be taking place spontaneously. A process of cross-identification was occurring, as a matrix of relationships developed within the partnership. We swapped recipes, holiday plans, news of children and of significant others, and encouraged each other through relationship breakdown and separation, health difficulties, and other life crises. This process was tracked by the project evaluator and is documented in her comments in the project publication (Page 2000).

> *At this point I will introduce another interjection. My case study was to explore and how I addressed tensions I experienced in relation to colleges and the project leader. Yet I have edited out descriptions of conflict included in earlier drafts, and may in the process have implied that they did not exist. As a result this case study may be giving a somewhat sanitised version of relationships between project participants (feedback on an earlier draft from Judi Marshall, my supervisor). In anticipation of my readers' possible scepticism, I have added the following paragraph:*
>
> The process of cross-fertilisation that I have described was far from harmonious; rivalry was never far beneath the surface and had to be managed and contained within project roles. This was done informally in discussions between consultants, with the project leader, within country groupings, and between consultants and project partners. At times partners or consultants made challenges to the project leadership or to me as consultant responsible for facilitation and for setting objectives for transnational meetings. However there was little scope for flexibility as funding was conditional on demonstrating that project and partner objectives had been met on an annual basis. As project objectives were met through transnational working sessions there could be little flexibility in how these meetings were run. Under these conditions tensions were high; these were managed within my consultancy sessions with the project leader and within the consultants' team.

Levels of participation by partners were uneven and there were sometimes tensions concerning delivery of results by some partners. There were sometimes power differences and conflicts within country groupings. The project manager and evaluator, based in Italy and Ireland respectively, developed close working

relationships with these country partners and were able to help address country specific issues and on this basis to advise the project leader.

Consultants discussed how participation was affected by culture difference and language barriers, by political and organisational contexts specific to each partner, and by power relationships within country partner participants. These issues were then picked up by the project manager and addressed within project activities and by the consultants' team.

I will develop a discussion about the politics of my selection and analysis of material in the 'Red Thread' that follows this chapter. Meanwhile this paragraph is intended to situate the analysis that follows in the more challenging aspects of the political environment in which the project was located.

The feminist concept of 'situated knowledge' makes a radical critique of positivist notions of science and of objectivity. In this view:

> Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of object and subject...
> These knowledges are necessarily partial, locatable and critical sustaining the possibility of a web of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology.
> (Harding 1991:191)

During this first meeting ELP participants took their first steps from sole allegiance to knowledge claims rooted in their specific locations towards willingness to acknowledge the located and partial nature of their claims. This shift opened up the possibility for a web of connections to be made, a process that developed over the following three years of the project. It did not take place only through a process of intellectual exchange, although this was one dimension of the process, but in the context of an environment that had been created to bridge differences between women. It occurred in the way they lived reciprocity within the matrix of relationships that we created and in the use of methodologies that invited inquiry into the nature and process of shared learning that was taking place.

At a meeting of partner organisations in the second year of the project, we reflected on the methods that we had used to facilitate exchange between partners. Partners stated that as a result of these methods they had felt that discussions had been unusually rich and

valuable compared to their experience of other projects. As a result of their learning from this experience Dutch and Italian partners had modified their local practice, making their local conferences more interactive, building time for reflection into their meetings, focussing more on context-specific differences between participants and setting time aside to jointly evaluate results. Visits to partner organisations had also generated a sense of potential to introduce changes. As a result of their visit to the lead partner organisation, Dutch partners initiated a diversity project to increase participation of black women in local politics.

However partners' shift towards development of new practice through dialogue and exchange of context-specific knowledge was not a shift made once and for all. Participants did not arrive at a given insight and then apply it. Working in environments of flux and change, they reported a process at transnational meetings that had to be constantly re-affirmed and re-tested over time. Their process of learning and the development of new knowledge through exchange proved to be fluid and not fixed, more of a moving back and forth which had to be sustained, and developed.

After the final conference of ELP I reflected on similar experiences of facilitation to conceptualise the challenges faced by women who come together to generate new knowledge about how to achieve gender equality, and then move back into their organisations to develop new practice. Working with a co-researcher, Anne Scott, I drew from feminist epistemology to conceptualise some of the challenges of this process. The following piece, taken from the paper which we co-authored, draws from Lorraine Code to speak of knowledge produced by women in relationships of trust (Code 1995; Page and Scott 2001). I introduce it at this point in my inquiry to illustrate the relational and political quality of the knowledge produced by participants in ELP:

> Lorraine Code (1995: 144 -153) develops the socially devalued concept of *gossip* as a way of thinking about the creation of new knowledge. She describes a film in which a suspicious death has occurred in an isolated farmhouse. While the sheriff and his assistant are engaged in an orderly, methodical, but ultimately fruitless, search for evidence that will implicate the dead man's wife, their two wives are collecting some items needed by the imprisoned woman, tidying up her kitchen... and gossiping. Through an engaged, emotionally interested, discussion of the domestic details they notice as they are working of the imprisoned woman's childhood, and of the links they see and feel with their own lives, they are able to move through their own differences, and reconstruct a narrative of brutal domestic

violence, which was ended when the woman murdered her husband. In the process these two women overcome an initial lack of trust associated with their own differences in status, build a new solidarity with each other and with the imprisoned woman, and decide to conceal what they know from their husbands.

This is knowledge that has arisen within relations of mutual trust and shared activity. It has not been collected in a methodical manner; in fact, it seems to be completely spontaneous. It has not been 'taught' in the traditionally understood sense of that term. It has arisen in relationship, through dialogue motivated by an emotional engagement with something outside itself. Although it is deeply particular – rooted in a particular context – its power comes from the fact that it both draws on and contributes to a wider understanding. This is shared knowledge which can be used for the purposes of social change. This is knowledge - both reliable and useful - which is not composed of individually owned, abstract, propositional facts. What is most necessary for its development is the provision of a safe space in which differences can be articulated, dialogue can take place, and relationships of trust can develop. This is the type of knowledge, we are arguing, which can be produced within a learning community of women (Page and Scott 2001).

At the meeting in the second year of the project I initiated discussion with partners about the nature of their exchange at transnational meetings. With help from the evaluator we arrived at an account of this exchange as a process of 'cross-fertilisation' rather than transfer. Partners referred to an exercise I had designed at the previous transnational meeting to enable them to help each other identify elements of transferable good practice. During this exercise partners had worked with partners from at least one other country. It had become apparent how difficult it was for partners to individually identify what might be of practical value to each other or to communicate how they worked to other partners. I had asked them to select aspects of each other's work that they had found valuable, and to make commitments to help each other develop new approaches based on this 'exchange' of practice. In feedback on the exercise they indicated that questions from partners working in different contexts had given them new insight into their own approaches and a new sense of the value of what they were doing.

We had moved from a process orientated to producing 'transfer of learning' to a process which allowed spontaneity of learning to take place within a matrix of relationships built on shared political commitment of women's equality. In the final year of the project we had to

find a presentational form for the process we had experienced which validated it within the product-orientated cultures of the organisations sponsoring the work. The challenge was to demonstrate that this process was indeed a new 'product' which would meet the requirements of the funder.

Epistemological struggles: From women's knowing to public knowledge; crossing the threshold

In this subsection I explore the conceptual challenges posed by the new approach to transfer of learning which we had adopted, and the process through which I worked with them. These conceptual challenges were interwoven with relational issues that I also explore.

At the beginning of year three I was given lead responsibility for the task of writing the ELP publication, the final product of the transnational partnership. Both lead partner and evaluator made it clear that they were relying on me to discover how this could be achieved. It was not until I began the process of writing the publication that I was able to move from intuiting to conceptualising the processes we had used for learning and exchange within the transnational partnership and to represent this as a transferable method.

Funders, partner organisations and consultants had a stake in our producing a definitive ELP recipe for gender mainstreaming. This product was to provide evidence of added value that could justify the time and resources invested in ELP. This was a requirement of the funder and in our funding application we had defined our product as 'transferable methods for gender mainstreaming'. This went beyond the considerable local results which partners had achieved.

Project participants had different views about the form that this product should take. Partners wanted something tangible and simple which they could show and circulate; an example given by one partner was a credit card sized checklist for gender equalities work that had been produced by a similar European funded partnership. There was a general feeling that our processes had not reached any firm conclusion, that while local results were tangible and good we had failed to produce the transferable good practice which the project had promised. Holding the lead responsibility for producing this, like a rabbit out of a hat, felt like a real challenge, alternately exhilarating and burdensome.

During the final year of the project I kept a journal to track my process in writing the handbook. In the following paragraph I quote from my journal to describe some of the qualities of this experience:

> *As I began writing the first draft of the handbook I found a language to describe how we had been working at transnational meetings. Reading the transnational meeting reports and evaluator's comments, I was able to see with fresh eyes the quality of interactions between partners. With a growing sense of excitement I began to see that as trust built up between partners we had been increasingly explicitly reflecting together on action at our transnational meetings, and that these exchanges had inspired participants to develop new practice. We had effectively been engaging in cycles of reflection and action, developing and enacting new practice.*
>
> *I decided to use action learning to describe how we had been working within the transnational partnership (McGill and Beaty 1992), and to present our variation on it as a core element of the ELP product.*

However in order to achieve transferability in practice I had to arrive at consensus with my colleagues. In the next period I steered a course between holding onto lead responsibility in order to shape the end product, and building a collaborative team approach to ensure joint ownership and shared responsibility. This was not an easy balance to keep. In designing the process for production of the ELP final publication I balanced the need to meet production deadlines and the need to ensure ownership by partners and project team. I also addressed my own needs for support and collaboration.

I initiated an editorial board and during the next ten months meetings were held where I 'reality tested' my conceptual framing of the methodology. It was not easy to step back from the exciting but solitary process of conceptualising in which I had been engaged, in order to enable colleagues to engage and contribute to the process. In the journal extract below I describe the quality of this experience:

> It was as if the method was so embedded in the relationships we had created within ELP that it was difficult to see what was there – and difficult to believe it could be reproduced outside the relationships we had made within the project.

I suggested that we might think of transnational meetings as a 'holding space' for partners, within which they had energised and re-motivated each other; and that the cross-fertilisation that had taken place through interactions at the sessions had inspired and encouraged them to develop their gender mainstreaming work and to produce results at local level.

The 'products' of ELP were the working method we had used in the transnational partnership to sustain and generate gender mainstreaming initiatives carried out by partners, and the framework for gender mainstreaming which partners had drawn up and agreed at the end of the first year. The 'results' were activities and gender mainstreaming interventions taken by partners at local and national level. In my text I described it thus:

The ELP 'product' is a method *for developing gender-mainstreaming practice within a learning partnership, using a* framework *of core principles that can be adapted to local context by members of the partnership (Page 2000b).*

It was difficult to arrive at this description, which in retrospect seems so clear. In the anxiety-laden context of pressure to demonstrate product, I felt that my professional competence and our consultancy relationship were at stake. This was an issue 'for me' but also 'for us'. Could we demonstrate that this project, on which we had build our professional relationships and staked shared passion and commitment, was worth something within the culture and priorities of her organisation?

Arriving at an agreed final draft was a difficult process that involved concentrated thinking work on my own and dialogue with colleagues on the project team and with partners. All needed to feel identified with the publication as a accurate description of the results and analysis of the processes in which they had participated. I embarked on a process of moving back and forth between drafting material and presenting it to partners and editorial board for comment, refining it and redrafting. This raised it's own issues of power between team members and with partners. Partners had to be encouraged to specify who their target audiences would be, enabled to think through what content would have maximum impact on them, and encouraged to draft case studies which would do justice to their initiative. This was achieved through a process of consultants' visits to partners. I tape recorded partners' accounts of their project work, and then used quotes from these discussions to enliven their case studies. In these discussions and in working with

subsequent feedback on draft text I aimed to honour their perceptions of results achieved, to engage with them on issues of presentation and on plans for material to be translated.

In drafting the publication I found myself effectively engaging in another cycle of knowledge making. I had drawn colleagues into this process and with them weathered the anxieties that it raised. We had not written up a description which had already been articulated, but together addressed the politics of representation: how to represent the way we had worked and relationships we had built as a method for gender mainstreaming? How to represent our method of cycles of reflection on action as adding value to organisations which valued outputs, but not processes?

At certain points I wondered whether I was describing a process that had actually taken place, or had created a good story to tell about it. I had shared my reflections and analysis of our work process with consultants and the lead partner on the editorial board, and with them arrived at an analysis that was reflected in draft text. But did partners share this analysis? I discussed this with the project evaluator, who reminded me of the quality of discussions of content and design at transnational meetings, of partners' feedback and discussion of draft text, and of consensus reached on the basis of critical and challenging discussion on the editorial board.

The Country of ELP

In writing this case study I relived much of the exhilaration and more painful challenges and tensions I had experienced on the project. In drafting and redrafting, I selected what to include or discard with different readers in mind and gained a sharper sense of the different stories I might tell. One of these was a story of collaboration and celebration of joint achievement, written for my clients and colleagues; another was a story of individual achievement, written in the voice of a consultant to potential clients. During the project this tension surfaced at points when project results had to be presented publicly in the publication and at the conference. In the earlier stages of drafting this case study I relived some of these tensions and found this to be a painful experience. Through the process of writing inquiry I have come to experience them differently and arrived at a different understanding of them.

At the certain point in writing an early draft I panicked, unable to go through with a narrative that seemed to be writing itself, against my best intentions, in a voice of individual subjectivity and need. My story was beginning to feel like a betrayal of our joint achievements, and to be too exposing of vulnerability within my professional identity and relationships.

I took this dilemma and my associated distress to a meeting with CARPP inquiry group, asked members for feedback and tape-recorded the discussion. During the session my supervisor suggested I could simply 'STOP the narrative'. This intervention enabled me to ask myself what was the story I wanted to be telling, and to whom?

As I was considering this, F telephoned, and I was able to explore with her some of my vulnerability related to the ending of the project.

This 'interruption' was timely, and a reminder to return to the voice of passion which had engaged my consultant voice at the beginning of this case study. I decided to use this opportunity to change the narrative of my case study. In the exchange that follows I show how I re-engaged with the shared political passion that had inspired our collaboration, and carried us through the more painful aspects of working on the project.

Writing from my inner voice

F just phoned to make an appointment to debrief, following our work on ELP: '*You can tape it*', she said, *'for your research'.*

Then I told her my dream.

We were on the underground, at the end of the project - or a holiday together. We arrived at my stop - and I grabbed up my bags and got off - in a rush and some confusion. The bags seemed a lot lighter than I remembered - I checked that I had them all with me. Then I had a real sense of disorientation - I could not see where I was or where to go - or remember what to do next. I told myself that I knew what to do in an underground station, look for the exit, and I only had to wait until my eyes would focus to see where to go. The most important thing to do was to wave F off- to give

her a good send off. I could not be sure where she was but waved anyway. At least I felt confident that that was the right thing to do.

This dream and interaction has enabled me to bring an aspect of my relationship with F into my case study that I had not adequately voiced. The dream reminded me of the reciprocity of care between us throughout the project. I was back in touch with the explosive tension between my responsibility as a consultant to ensure she was able to carry out the tasks needed to meet the project goals, balancing our individual needs with the needs of the project. In the dream I gave her a good send off, and was left holding my own disorientation, with a sense that there was no one to care for me. The lighter bags suggested that I had emptied myself out but was also freed up to move on. This inquiry has also helped me to do that.

But in the telephone conversation F had acknowledged the need to move on. We would after all share the work of ending the project, and the meaning we each made of that ending. The tension between the inner world of our inter-subjectivities and the outer world of presentation and product had taken a toll; but the connection we had forged was based on reciprocal care and acknowledgement of our individual needs.

In this moment of insight, I knew that this tension between inner and outer world realities in feminist women's work based relationships was what my inquiry was about.

Women in ELP, in common with many women who work on women's equality issues, brought a passion to their work, and this brought challenge and tension to their relationships with each other. This case study shows that these can be worked through, with careful discussion and attention to relationship, using inquiry based skills.

Conclusions

Breaking out through inquiry

In order to fulfil my consultancy role I held in tension three sets of needs: care for the individual client, care for the overall project, and care for my own needs. Achieving this balance was not easy. In relational terms, partners and consultants sustained each other through reciprocal acts of care; there were also moments of tension when challenge was

needed and given in order to attend to task. Shared passion for the work spilled over into relationships between participants and raised issues that could not be neatly resolved at a level of 'task' and 'role'. This lent a quality to interactions that I maintain was about passion and care between women committed to working together towards equality in the public arena. In order to access this material I developed a method which allowed my different voices to speak.

In this case study I have tried to illustrate how I lived out some of these issues and negotiated them with women in client and consultant roles on the project. This was not a simple or straightforward matter. I have shown that for me they raised complex issues concerning self-image and self-presentation as a feminist lesbian consultant, as well as concerning presentation of my consultancy methods in ways that demonstrated their added value to organisations. I experienced these issues in relationships with my colleagues and in order to address them took account of the values enacted within the project as well as within our organisation and policy environments. At different moments of the project I experienced competition, rivalry, envy and anger, and observed this in some of the other participants.

As a personal journey, writing this case study has provided me with opportunities for dialogue that introduced an element of healing to my inquiry. In her feedback on this chapter F confirmed that while we had different perceptions of some of the dynamics between us during our work on the project we had shared passionate involvement in the project work and had been able to engage in dialogue from our different perspectives.

However I do not wish to convey a sense of closure or too tidy resolution. This would imply a stasis that would belie the dynamic elements in my account. In our process of working together, participants created a dance in which we affirmed or withheld affirmation in our roles as partners and project consultants, and experienced moments of insight and moments of confusion as we struggled to make meaning together. The materiality of the ELP 'product' belies the fluidity of its meaning, as each partner stated that they would use it in their own contexts, in their own way, for their own purposes.

The 'country of ELP' which we created was an environment in which good enough relationships were sustained to enable partners to negotiate power relationships, to move between shared passion for the work and care for each other, in order to carry out the tasks of the project.

My inquiry during and after my consultancy provided me with a non-judgmental space from which to consider how I was enacting my role in relation to others on the project, similar to the reflective space that I tried to provide for participants in the project. Within these spaces my colleagues and I used high level relational skills; skills which are undervalued and largely invisible in organisations, and almost inevitably taken for granted when used by women (Fletcher 1998). In this sense writing this case study was an act of 'mainstreaming'; revealing hidden relational skills and activities needed to sustain a gender-mainstreaming project.

Writing this case study enabled me to conceptualise further the process I led as methodology consultant to ELP. It has also enabled me to clarify some of the tensions and conflicts I experienced in reconciling collaborative approaches and accreditation of individual leadership. I have arrived at a new sense of clarity about the methods I used and, like the partners in ELP, an ability to describe and see which of them I may continue to use in my consultancy in different contexts in the future.

Red Thread 3

Sustaining Feminist Collaboration

In this Red Thread I explore the tensions I experienced on the ELP project in terms of the multiple frames in which my colleagues and I were working. Moving between these frames raised dilemmas within my own sense of identity and self-image and within my relationship to the project leader, colleagues and partners on the ELP project.

In writing my case study, I noted that with successive drafts the tensions I was describing seemed to recede, almost as if I was either disappearing or resolving the less palatable aspects of them through my inquiry. In this commentary, I turn my attention to the politics of the narrative I constructed through my inquiry and ask what I can learn now about the political challenges of feminist inquiry and of feminist consultancy.

In my case study I explored a series of tensions that I had lived out in my consultancy. Theses were:

- Sexual and gender identity v organisation or project culture
- Processes v product orientation
- Individual v collaborative approaches to consultancy and project leadership

In revisiting the project reports, I noticed that these tensions had permeated discussions during the project and had been lived out by partners as well as consultants. Each of us had to balance individual advancement, or survival, with feminist values in environments that no longer favoured women's equality.

Partners as for consultants' approaches to achieving gender mainstreaming project goals and to disseminating results was informed by needs for self-promotion and survival within the organisational and policy environments on which we were dependent as well by our political commitment to women's equality. However potential conflicts were not expressed as a series of binary oppositions; rather, they were accepted by participants as part of the context in which we were operating and referred to as considerations which had to be held in tension. Dissemination of results, for example, served both to promote partners' work

and to help them in their political and professional development. Partners and consultants became adept at presentations adapted to rational output-related environments, and partners used the political currency carried by European sponsorship of the project to widen their political and professional impact. This was documented by consultants in reports from transnational meetings, project newsletters and in the evaluator's report as well as in the project publication. While the fluid environments in which partners were working made it difficult to assess sustainability of organisation change results, these gains in practical and political knowledge of individual participants were permanent.

This intertwining of individual career with project change goals had its impact on relationships between partners and on relationships between partners and consultants. At transnational level participants encouraged each other in relation to individual needs and project goals. Sometimes boundaries became blurred between self-promotion through the project and promotion of the project in order to achieve project goals. These situations tested trust in relationships between participants at different levels of seniority within country groupings and between partners and consultants. One partner ,who was taking part in her unpaid voluntary time, challenged the need for paid consultants and suggested that partners possessed the skills for facilitation and evaluation. Managing these tensions within relationships between participants was an important aspect of project consultancy and project leadership.

But how did ELP consultants balance concern for their business needs with feminist values in their work on the ELP project? This was not a subject that was openly discussed, except in brief asides before and after meetings. Rather, in my experience, consultants acted as if the project provided the means for us to work together to implement shared values. Business and feminist political goals were not distinguished until I made bids for accreditation of my work towards the end of the project.

In Red Thread I drew on the concept of **'tempered radicals'** to explore the tension in my first case study between shared political values and individual business interests. In this Red Thread I will draw from feminist research on **friendship between women in organisations** to analyse these issues further. In doing so I aim to bring into sharper focus the politics of my inquiry into ELP project relationships.

In ELP, collaboration and participation in the project was sustained by shared political passion for the project work. Collaboration was not confined to professional roles, but spilled over into friendships that developed from this shared political passion. In my

interview discussions I explored how contributors enacted boundaries between social and professional roles with women colleagues and clients. In all cases, contributors described a preference for permeable boundaries while identifying both positive and negative consequences, and cultural differences in how these were interpreted.

In the challenging political environment in which the project ran friendship was an important factor in sustaining relationships. Yet, in writing my case study, I left it out, feeling that revealing friendship might invalidate my findings and undermine the professionalism of my consultancy. In doing so I suspected that I was enacting a tacit norm within organisation research: acknowledgement of friendship risks undermining claims of individual professional competence. Further, it might undermine the validity of the project, as friendship between women and real 'work' must surely be incompatible.

Reading feminist research has led me to reconsider the politics of this decision. To illustrate this re-framing I selected two separate research articles in which this implied public/private boundary was challenged by assertions of work-based friendship. In these articles, women's friendship and shared political passion is shown to be an important resource to the individuals concerned and to the organisations of which they are part.

The first of these is an autobiographical account of a work-based friendship between two women who are lecturers in a community education college (Andrew and Montague 1998). Their account has similarities to my friendship with the ELP project leader and to contributors' accounts in my interviews of positive aspects of their work-based relationships with women (chapter 6). The researchers refer to their friendship as a resource offering support, encouragement, fun and stimulation, enabling joint projects to be initiated and carried through. In their analysis (p. 356) they draw from research which argues that a key characteristic of friendship is the extent to which it provides affirmation of oneself as a competent, worthwhile person (Wright 1978, cited in O'Connor 1992). In the gendered workplace, they observe, identity validation is not something to be taken lightly. Friendship can become a tool for challenging patriarchal practices in the workplace, creating and maintaining views about the world (p. 360). This can have negative or positive consequences, providing a haven from which to take refuge and avoid confrontation or a base from which to sustain constructive challenge.

The researchers describe reactions from male colleagues to their public expression of friendship similar to those described by contributor C (see summary of interview in chapter 6). They suggest that male colleagues found it unsettling, threatening and challenging (p.

359). They conclude that friendship between women does reinforce the challenge offered by women's presence in any aspect of public life: 'instead of nurturing male colleagues, we nurture each other' (p. 359). From this perspective, friendship between women 'challenges hetero-reality' and gives full integrity to the claim that the personal is political (Raymond 1986, cited in Andrew and Montague p. 361). Raymond uses the term 'gyn-affection' to describe 'woman to woman attraction, influence and movement' (1986 p.7). She claims that women who affect women 'stimulate response and action; bring about a change in living; stir and arouse emotions, ideas, activities that defy dichotomies between the personal and political aspects of affection (1986 p. 8).

From this perspective I wish to reassert the importance of friendship as a key sustaining resource which enabled ELP to develop innovative methods in challenging circumstances. Through these methods we generated and drew upon 'gyn/affection' to power our gender mainstreaming interventions in the gendered organisations in which we worked. This is not to say that friendship was unproblematic; it was a source of negative as well as positive emotion. However, it was an expression of political passion and shared commitment to the work and in this sense could not be separated from the politics of the work to which we had jointly committed.

The second research article from which I will draw is concerned with the place of passion in a feminist network (Beres, Wilson 1997). This article notes that:

> The history of organisation theory may be seen in part as a process in which a series of non-rational factors have been conjured up only to be subdued by the rationalising core (Iannello 1992, p. 23, cited Beres, Wilson p.1)

They offer a case study of the importance of emotions in the founding and development of a feminist organisation. They note that additional stresses as well as high levels of motivation are likely to be experienced by individual members of organisations set up to meet needs that are unmet, even unacknowledged, by society (Perlmutter 1994, cited in Beres, Wilson p. 178). In their analysis of challenge and change within the development of the network they argue that emotional commitment to the project and the egalitarian principles through which it was managed enabled the organisation to function and change over time. This commitment was expressed through negative as well as positive emotion.

This account of these additional stresses, arising from the nature of social justice work and of emotion generated by high levels of motivation, bears similarities to my experience of participation on ELP. Their analysis draws from research on emotions in organisations which asserts that:

> The different groupings in organisations and their relative hierarchical and status positions must be held in place by feelings - such as belonging, respect, diffidence, fear, awe, love (Fineman 1993, p. 14, cited in Beres, Wilson p. 178).

On the basis of their analysis, they challenge the usefulness of rationalising emotions, claiming that reducing emotion can also reduce commitment and that an understanding of the emotional labour that is needed in any organisation is one way of understanding how to move forward (p. 180). Their analysis of emotional labour is drawn from Hochschild who distinguishes between 'emotional work', managing feelings 'at a personal level', and emotional labour, knowing about and managing other people's as well as one's own emotions' (Hochschild 1993, p. 4, cited in Beres, Wilson p.179).

In my consultancy to ELP I used the concept of relational work to describe both emotional work and emotional labour. While emotional labour was undertaken explicitly by consultants in our facilitation of work by partners, managing our own feelings took place outside the consultancy frame and was discussed informally or not at all. My inquiry created a space to bring this work into the consultancy frame. However in doing so I experienced intense feelings of vulnerability. This vulnerability now takes on a different meaning as an assertion of passion as well as of friendship as a dimension of my analysis, breaking the mould of rationality and of professional roles as sole basis for understanding consultancy-based change interventions.

What images of how women enact *feminist* collaboration in *political* and *business* settings has this Red Thread generated? What values did I and the women with whom I 'did' feminist consultancy enact, as we tried to act on our political values while attending to our respective needs to sustain ourselves within the organisational environments we had set out to change?

Certainly those of committed activists, skilful political actors mindful of personal and political agendas, collaborators able to keep a sense of the specific organisational and political contexts in which each partner was developing their interventions. Consultants' roles were to facilitate this process through acts of translation and of interpretation,

reflecting back to partners the value of their work on the project and encouraging them to transfer their learning from it for use in different contexts. Finally, to enable them to represent results in forms recognisable in the eyes of different constituents: the product-orientated measures of the funding environment, the political environments in which their organisations were operating, and the representatives of the intended beneficiaries of gender mainstreaming measures.

In the following case study, I will describe a set of relationships in which passion based on shared political commitment was absent from the consultancy frame. While friendships based on political passion were established within some of the country groupings they did not develop and were not encouraged within the transnational project. Emotion was often referred to as inhibiting rather than enabling and was seldom acknowledged except in these terms in consultancy discussions. Project leadership was modelled on roles defined according to primary task and project relationships were enacted within these task - defined boundaries. However, far from removing emotion from the frame this sometimes led to hostility associated with conflicts that could not be directly addressed within project relationships.

In Red Thread 2 and in the following case study, I use the term 'tempered radical' to describe the role played by the senior women manager with whom I worked. The term now seems equally relevant as a description of the ELP partnership. ELP participants were all explicitly identified with women's equality policy agendas within their organisations or sector. In this sense they did not share the ambivalence of the tempered radical. However as women in environments resistant to implementation of women's equality they did experience struggle to handle the tension between their personal and professional identities. As tempered radicals their radicalism was expressed by intentional acts and by simply being who they were; it was tempered by anger about social injustice, and by political judgement about how to express this. Through ELP, they became involved in a joint project which developed organisation change interventions and survival strategies for the individual participants. The partnership took the form of an 'insider/outsider alliance' whose 'top down and bottom up' strategies embraced both insider knowledge and external radical change perspectives. Affiliation with people who represent both sides of their identity is one of the strategies proposed by Meyerson and Scully to enable tempered radicals steer a course between assimilation and separatism (p. 597). These affiliations help them to keep in touch with their passion and with their ability to speak as outsiders. The 'country of ELP' provided a 'home' within which both insiders and outsiders were able to recognise the roles they were playing and within which

they sustained each other in both their radical convictions and in the need for strategy 'tempered' by political judgement.

Chapter 11

Case Study 3

Doing Feminist Consultancy in Mainstream Organisations
An Inquiry Based Change Intervention

Section 1
Introduction, Method and Case Study Overview

Introduction

This case study is concerned with dilemmas that arose during my consultancy within a three year European project which aimed to develop methods for sustaining women in leadership roles in organisations. To respect confidentiality I have used fictitious names to refer to this project and its participants.

In the case study, I show how I used inquiry to sustain myself as a partner in the transnational project and as external consultant to my client organisation. In both of these arenas transnational partners, clients and myself made assumptions concerning women's leadership, feminist collaboration, and trust. In my inquiry I explore these assumptions, identify similarities and differences between my own expectations and those of my clients and partners, and reflect on their implications for feminist collaboration and consultancy practice.

Method

As in my second case study, this is a selective account of a multi-layered inquiry. My inquiry took place over the three years of the consultancy project and continued through successive drafts of my case study. In its first phase it was practice based, intertwined with and adding richness to my consultancy activities. It took the form of reflective practices, undertaken on my own and drawing from them discussions with colleagues, clients, partners, and practitioners outside the project. In its second phase, after the consultancy was completed, my inquiry practices focussed on analysis through reflection. At the end of the consultancy project, I sought and was given permission to tape record research discussions with members of my client organisation and with transnational partners for use within this inquiry. I reference this material within this case study, and show how these discussions opened up dialogue on a different level with clients and partners.

During the consultancy project I kept journals tracking how I made sense of the dynamics of power and leadership on both the transnational and the local project. I recorded my reflections before and after working sessions, discussions with transnational partners and within the client organisation. I have drawn from these records selectively in order to illustrate the process of reflection that informed my analysis and practice throughout the consultancy project.

During my consultancy, and during my drafting of this case study, intensive inner work was necessary to process difficult and challenging emotion. In the case study I show how this inner work enabled me to shift from a conceptual and ontological position which led to 'blame' to engagement with multiple frames for 'doing gender' within the transnational project.

I discussed several drafts of this chapter with my inquiry group and supervisor, and made substantive changes which addressed their feedback. I clarified my description of complex project roles and structures and identified themes that cut across my wider inquiry. I set out to write a case study that would 'tell the story' of a completed consultancy intervention. In the process of writing, I found myself confronted with further questions, a Pandora's Box of uncomfortable feelings, and a strong desire to 'close the file'. I resisted this desire, fired by the conviction that many of the questions that confronted me were at the core of my feminist consultancy practice, and embarked upon a further cycle of

inquiry. This 'writing inquiry' began several months after the consultancy project had ended.

In writing this case study I became more interested in how use of inquiry had informed my consultancy practice. In it I critically appraise my sense-making as it had unfolded during the consultancy, and how it shaped my consultancy interventions. What had I learned about how my colleagues and clients understood gendered power, and how I had understood it in relation to them? What had I learned about the challenges of building an equal partnership, a 'coalition' between feminists in mainstream organisations? How did we negotiate issues of power, leadership and trust between ourselves? How would I now adjust my approach and methods?

Case study overview

This case study is written in six sections. This introduction is followed by section 2, an overview of the Persephone project. It describes the context in which the project was developed and the project aims, structure, methodology, and results; introduces the transnational partners and describes the consultancy roles I adopted at different stages of the project.

Section 3 is concerned with leadership within the transnational project. It explores how expectations of leadership were enacted between transnational partners and illustrates how I worked with these dynamics. In it I critically appraise my sense-making frames, drawing from research on expectations of women leaders,and referring back to the conclusions of previous cycles of inquiry (chapters 6, 7).

Section 4 is concerned with collaboration between women in my client organisation. In it I explore how leadership, power and trust were enacted. I draw parallels between patterns enacted within the client organisation and between transnational partners.

In Sections 5 and 6, I consider the tensions between organisation development and feminist approaches in my consultancy. I explore the meanings of silence and my role as a breaker of silence within the client organisation and in the transnational project. I relate these dynamics to conflicts concerning the positioning of the project, and draw conclusions concerning the challenges of gendering organisational practice.

Section 2

The Persephone project

Persephone Project overview

This section begins with an introduction to the Project and its transnational partners, and follows with a description of my project roles and stake in the Project. I map the tensions that I experienced on the project and signpost those that I address in this chapter.

I offer this overview from my own standpoint, knowing that each player would have a different story to tell. In it I aim to situate my account of the expectations I held of the project and how I worked with these as the project unfolded.

The Project Persephone partnership

The Persephone Project was a transnational multi-sectoral partnership of organisations in five countries. The project ran for three years and was part-funded by the European Commission. Its purpose was to develop a portfolio of change interventions, designed to attract and retain women in leadership.

Partner organisations were drawn from university based women's studies, public service companies, local authorities, consultancy organisations, and professional support networks for women's businesses. The initial approach to these organisations was through individuals known to me through women's networks; they had expertise and organisational responsibility for an aspect of gender equality or of women's leadership development.

These individuals drew up the programme of activities and budget on which the initial project proposal was based and negotiated approval within their organisations. When the project was approved, they held responsibility for the project on behalf of their organisations. While not all identified as feminist, all were highly committed to women's equality and shared a personal stake in it that they had to balance with the business objectives of their organisations. However, they had different degrees of position power within their organisations and this affected their degree of autonomy and control over participation in the Persephone Project.

Project management rested with the lead partner organisation which was formally accountable to the European Commission. Internal reporting arrangements were designed to enable the lead partner to meet EC requirements and linked performance to tight financial control.

Figure 1
Reporting lines within the Persephone Project

Consultant partners were paired with employing organisations within each participating country; consultant / client pairs (C/C pairs) were responsible for their own programme of activities, within the timeframe set by the transnational project. Activities were in three phases, as shown in Figure 2 below.

Objectives in Phase 1 were for C/C pairs were to diagnose barriers to women in leadership in the employer organisation; in the second phase to pilot methods for addressing these barriers; and in the third to evaluate these methods. A transnational meeting took place at the beginning of each phase; consultant partners met separately at the beginning of phases 2 and 3. A publication was written by an editorial board made up of the project leader, the disseminating partner and myself containing summaries of the training and consultancy methods and approaches developed by partners and reflections on the challenges of sustaining women in leadership positions. In order to protect confidentiality it cannot be referenced.

Figure 2
Phases of project activity

Phase 1

- C/C pairs identify barriers to women in leadership and select area of intervention
- First Transnational meeting

Phase 2

- C/C pairs design and pilot consultancy interventions
- Second Transnational meeting; First Consultants' meeting

Phase 3

- C/C pairs evaluate piloted methods
- Editorial Board writes transnational project handbook
- Third Transnational meeting; Second Consultants' meeting

My roles in the Persephone project

The funding proposal for the Persephone project arose from my previous research interests and was developed jointly by the project leader and myself. I describe this process and the way that it shaped my participation in the project in the following subsection.

During the life of the project I took up three different roles:
When the project proposal was approved, I became consultant partner to a local authority. In this capacity I developed an inquiry based change methodology which I explore in this case study.
Mid-way through the project I negotiated an additional role for myself as transnational co-ordinator. In this capacity I used my research role to raise difficult and controversial issues concerning inter-partner relationships. Through reflection on my discussions with partners I surfaced and challenged assumptions I had been carrying concerning the enactment of power and leadership within the project.
In phase 3 I was a member of the editorial board who co-authored the final publication. This was a valuable opportunity to identify and explore tensions between feminist, business and organisation development that informed our conceptual frames and

practices. On the basis of this exploration I was able to reappraise my expectations of the project and arrive at a different analysis of power dynamics between partners and in my client organisation. I used my inquiry to invite partners and women in my client organisation to reflect on the power dynamics of consultancy and project relationships.

My stake in the Persephone project

The Persephone project was initiated by the lead partner and myself and was several years in the making. In the rest of this section, I describe this process.

The vision I brought to Project Persephone was feminist and political. I also saw the project as a business opportunity. Through it I aimed to move into organisation development and out of the more marginal and specialist area of equal opportunities. These two approaches brought tensions that I had not anticipated to my approach to the transnational partnership and to my consultancy with my client organisation.

Reconciling political vision with business objectives held by their organisations was a challenge for each of the partners. Thus, while feminist political vision inspired and sustained my participation, as conflicts developed it also became a source of intense disappointment and loss. Unspoken assumptions were made about how the project should be managed; feminist' organising principles came into conflict with project management based on institutional requirements.

The diary entry below illustrates how I experienced this conflict in my own expectations at the beginning of the project:

> ***I remember the strange sense of unreality that I experienced as project partners gathered for formal dinner at the first transnational meeting. The formality of the dinner and stilted conversation contrasted with my expectation of a more celebratory, riotous gathering of feminists. I felt out of my depth, out of my territory, as if something I had created had turned into a creature that was alien, and a shared language, and history, a form of commonality that I had taken for granted was absent.***
> ***I was caught between my expectation of embarking on a feminist project and the shock of realisation that the work of creating this project had yet to begin.***

Diary entry, January 1997, first meeting of transnational partners of the Persephone Project

My starting point had been a growing impatience with competence based analyses of women's leadership and with debates about gender difference in women's leadership style. My research interest was in expectations and perceptions of women leaders and how women negotiated them. I wanted to develop my previous research, drawing from organisational and psychodynamic sources.

In the years leading up to my design and implementation of this project I drew from psychodynamic and feminist research to develop a more systemic and approach to my consultancy. I was inspired by feminist claims that gendered power is enacted and reproduced through organisational practices and sustained through organisational cultures (Itzin and Newman 1995; Mills and Tancred 1992; Maddock 1995). From this perspective gender divisions are produced through the workings of management and organisational systems, and cannot be reduced to individual behaviours.

Psychodynamic approaches to organisation consultancy analyse how individuals, groups and organisations interact as systems (Hirschorn 1993; Menzies Leith 1960; Miller 1993; Obholzer and Zagier Roberts 1994). Research studies from which I drew were based on consultancy practice and offered concepts for understanding how individuals enact organisational roles though a complex interplay of conscious and unconscious dynamics. In chapter 2 I described more fully how these and other sources informed my practice.

Over a period (1994 -7) I sought potential partners with whom to develop a funding proposal. When a participant on an event that I facilitated expressed interest I initiated discussions with her. Her organisation was prestigious and represented a 'mainstream' tradition of organisation development and change work with which I wanted to be associated. We established a mutual interest in developing an EU funding proposal and over the following year met regularly in order to do this. During this time I initiated discussions with individual women I had met through women's professional networks to establish their interest and potential for bringing their organisations into the project. They were consultants, management educators and researchers in public and business sectors. Budgets were tight, and depended on match funding from partners' organisations. Proposals were required to demonstrate how the project activities would meet partner organisations' business objectives. We submitted a proposal from twelve partner organisations to a European funding programme based on a 'business case' for 'attracting

and retaining women in leadership'.

A year later, our proposal was approved on a reduced budget. Faced with the difficult choice of going ahead on a budget that would not fund the activities we had planned, or pulling out, the lead organisation decided to go forward. However this meant asking partners to begin with a series of negotiations to reduce their activities and secure approval new work programmes. At this point, five partners withdrew due to changes in organisational priorities and individual employment positions. As I show in the next section, the reduced funding set the scene for difficulties that beset the project throughout its life.

My stake in the project was considerable. In financial terms, I had invested two years of unpaid time into development work with no certain outcome. In terms of professional development I saw this was an opportunity to develop and market my consultancy, both by developing new organisational approaches to women's equality, and to position myself within a tradition of organisation development and change consultancy that carried more status and respect.

While I did succeed in developing new consultancy methodologies and a new sense of my professional competence, the personal cost was high. As partners responded to resource problems by becoming increasingly embattled, and I found myself increasingly drawn into destructive interactions between partners and project leadership. Assumptions I had made concerning the transnational collaboration proved to have been over optimistic.

In sections 3 and 4 below I explore these dynamics and show how I worked with them during the life of the project.

Section 3

A transnational partnership: On the margins or in the mainstream?

In this section I describe resource and political challenges in the project environment and explore their impact on relationships within the project, including my relationship to the project leader. I draw conclusions regarding the methodology I developed for feminist

collaboration.

The project environment

Discussions with consultants and employees in the public sector during and prior to this project showed that reduced funding, low priority and status, and precariousness of position have become increasingly typical of gender equality initiatives within this sector. This trend had a direct impact on the project partnership: several of the organisations that had originally signed up to the project withdrew commitment when the funding was approved a year later. Consultant partners who had been 'paired' with these organisations then had to replace them, or also withdraw from the project.

In four out of five of the employing organisations, individuals who had drawn up the project proposal had moved on and no longer had a brief that allowed them to participate in the project. Consultant partners with whom they had drawn up the proposal had to try to identify a different lead individual who would champion the project work with in these employing organisations. The project had been approved on a reduced budget and work programmes had to be tailored within these constraints. This was particularly difficult given the marginality of women's equality work in each of these employing organisations, the low status of individuals who had originally been lead contacts, and comparatively high investment of resources demanded by the transnational project.

Several individuals who had been committed to the project in employer organisations lost institutional backing at this point and withdrew from the project. One consultant partner withdrew. Others who remained had to rise to the challenges of devising work programmes within reduced budgets, and negotiating the internal resources and ownership to enable the project to move forward. These work programmes then had to be costed and agreed with the lead organisation who then formally contracted with each partner.

This process proved to be a source of considerable difficulty and anxiety for most consultant partners. Within partner relationships the focus of communication with the project leader soon became contractual obligation rather than the substance of the work that partners were seeking to develop. A great deal of anger was expressed over administrative, funding and management issues. As the project developed these relationships continued to be a flash point for conflicts relating to power and project

leadership. During the first year communication between most national project partners and the project leader had become conflictual, and communication between partners was minimal. Far from a collaborative work group, the relationships between project partners were characterised by hostility and frustrated hopes for support.

Resourcing difficulties and conflicting expectations for project leadership were major contributing factors to these difficulties. In the next section I draw from my own experience as a partner in the transnational project to explore how these practical challenges shaped my own approach to collaboration within the transnational project.

Power and dependency

> This project had exceptionally high dependency needs.
> *Project leader*

In this section I show myself in action as an inquirer in the final year of the project. I illustrate how I used my inquiry to make a critical appraisal of scope for transnational collaboration between partners and within my own relationship to the project leader. In the indented text below I present slices of inquiry conducted during the consultancy, interspersed with commentary made at the time of writing this case study.

> *Using inquiry to test scope for collaboration between transnational partners*
> *At the second transnational project meeting, mid-way through the project, partners gave reports of their own work but showed little interest in each other's. Challenge to the project leader was aggressive, and focussed on mismanagement. I experienced an overwhelming sense of loss, as it became increasingly clear that the collaborative project was not to be.*
>
> *But how to make sense of the conflict was becoming less clear to me as we reached mid-point in the project. I found myself moving between different conceptual frames, as well as different subject positions, as I talked with partners and with the project leader. Evidence from my conversations with individual partners and from exchanges at the second transnational meeting suggested that as well as challenging the project leader, partners were resisting engagement with each other. I was no longer sure how far my vision of collaborative working was shared, after all.*

An opportunity to find out arose shortly after this meeting, when the funder responded to the project interim report requiring more transnational linking. I negotiated a new role for myself, as transnational co-ordinator. In the final year of the project I visited each partner to try to stimulate more transnational exchange. I also invited them to discuss what in their view were the reasons for lack of collaboration, and tried to test my own views.

All complained about inadequate communication, late payments and bad project administration. However two of the consultant partners took the view that common ground could have been built if a different kind of leadership had been given. One referred to spending more time at the beginning sharing contextual information, familiarising each other with plans and project approaches; the other suggesting that stronger and more directive project management and regular information bulletins would have helped create this. When asked why they did not take the initiative to build links with other partners themselves, or use the transnational meetings to share more, they said that differences between projects were too great to establish closer links.

The experience of gathering this material prompted me to interrogate my own position within the project. I had set off expecting to find a shared vision of cross-fertilisation, learning and exchange, and a chance to enact this in the final months of the project. What I found was ambivalence rather than curiosity, and self-preoccupation. I came away with the words of one of the project partners: 'Common ground has to be built, it does not come ready-made'.

While it was too late to increase collaboration between project partners, I was able to use my inquiry to establish a more equal collaboration of my own with the project leader. In the following accounts I describe two 'moments' to illustrate this. In the rest of this section I describe the practices and process through which I established a more equal position in relation to her.

Moment 1

At the beginning of the third project year I began work on the publication with the project leader and disseminator partner. Initial meetings were tense; a conceptual framework had to be devised which could accommodate the business-led and political frameworks that we individually brought to the project, and which would adequately market each of our contributions to the project.

During one of the first meetings, disagreement developed between the project leader and myself. She overrode my view on the basis of professional expertise. At that moment it seemed that my personal vision and professional identify were at stake; the consultancy I had developed through the project and had hoped to market through it might not after all be adequately represented in the project publication. I felt overwhelmed with loss and started to cry, feeling flooded with anger and distress.

She looked at her watch, remarked that we had almost reached the time we had agreed to finish, said she had an important call to make, and ended the meeting. Gave me a farewell hug and left without any other acknowledgement of my distress. In accepting her hug I felt disbelief and confusion as if I was colluding in denial of the reality of my distress - or was I?

It seemed to me in retrospect that at that moment of conflict, there had been room for only one of us to be right.

Moment 2
A year later I was on my way to the final transnational project meeting. This time I was determined that I was going to sustain my independent voice in relation to the project leader and partners, and, by speaking from my experience as initiator and partner, claim my stake in leadership of the project. I prepared carefully, using my inquiry to set clear objectives for conveying my perceptions of partner / leadership issues to the project leader and inviting her to respond; working out how to contribute to discussion without getting drawn into confrontation or allowing myself to be silenced. I used my research stake in the project to construct an independent subject position as inquirer in relation to partners and project leader. In this role as inquirer I succeeded in sustaining this subject position, using the tape recorder as a visible reminder to others and myself.

In the first moment, assertion of an opposing view as 'right' effectively erased my knowledge as 'wrong' and made me feel I had literally 'disappeared '. At that moment an

epistemological erasure felt equivalent to an ontological erasure; my very existence, identity and not just my opinions were at stake. On a political level, I experienced a sense of trust in collaboration and dialogue betrayed.

In the second moment, I was no longer expecting to find pre-given common ground. In my preparation I constructed a position from which to assert my views and to invite dialogue while setting clear boundaries to compromise. To achieve this I had made an ontological shift from looking for connection on my ground, towards inviting an exchange through which common ground might be built (chapter 7). This shift had to be actively and consciously worked for, using a variety of strategies over a period of time.

In the second and third years I developed project roles that enabled me to work within the limitations of the project while holding onto my political vision and business objectives. This process posed tremendous challenges. The project title and objective, to develop methods for sustaining women in leadership, was charged with personal meaning for participants, each of whom brought their experience and desires for being sustained as women managing under resourced equalities initiatives in their own organisations or sectors.

In her research into women and leadership, Sinclair suggests female leaders re-activate the conflict between our need to be nurtured and our drive to be independent (Sinclair 1998). She states mothers may be admired for their strength, but we forgive them less than the first male leaders in our lives, and that powerful women are magnets for the largely unconscious ambivalence about mothers and the feminine that both men and women feel; Sinclair 1998:176). The intensity of frustration that partners experienced in relation to the project leadership was often explosive. Sinclair's description of powerful conscious and unconscious dynamics at play captures the quality of intense feeling and of confusion that I experienced in relation to the project leader. In the rest of this section I describe how I attempted to contain and work with the destructive elements of these dynamics, in order to arrive at deeper understanding of the dynamics we were enacting.

As co-initiator of the project I had to take up a leadership role of my own; to do this I had to work with my own frustrations concerning the project limitations and hold onto my desire for support in my consultancy role. I developed inquiry practices to work with my inner world, and to engage in dialogue with colleagues. Throughout the life of the project I recorded my feeling and thinking responses and drew from attachment and psychodynamic theory to make sense of them. I tested my sense-making with partners

and with colleagues external to the project. Through these reflective practices and discussions I developed a meta-commentary on my sense-making of the subjective quality of my experience in relation to the project leader, partners and clients. Informed by this process I made practical interventions, taking on different formal project roles in order to promote more collaborative working relationships.

I asked myself what had been the enabling factors which contributed to my moving from the felt position of powerlessness in relation to the project leader, with which I began the project, to a sense of being a contributor in my own right? A movement from an 'either / or' to a 'both /and' position in relation to my leadership of the project?

Changes in our each of working environments had an impact on my sense of dependency and of power within our relationship.

At the beginning of the project I was financially dependent on the project and relied on payments arriving on agreed dates. Administrative shortcomings and delayed payments from the funder increased my vulnerability as a sole trader and sense of relative powerlessness in relation to the project leader. The experience of exposing my financial need through a series of requests to progress delayed payments felt intensely humiliating. Mid-way through the project my consultancy fortunes had improved. I could then respond to the delays as administrative shortcomings, rather than the callous disregard attack on my well being which I had previously experienced.

Mid-way through the project, the project leader faced professional challenges and asked for my support. This offered me an opportunity to negotiate changes in project management and to reinstate the joint leadership role that I had expected to have within the project. I was able to confront some of my difficulties with project management and extend my role to transnational co-ordinator. This gave me responsibility and additional consultancy time to address the lack of transnational co-operation directly with transnational partners.

At the moment of preparing for this negotiation I experienced powerful feelings of fear, anger and vulnerability. I was determined to grasp this opportunity to challenge her approach to project management practice and assert the leadership I believed was needed to introduce more collaboration within the project. In working through these feelings I was able to recognise the extent to which I had made her into an object of my

own powerful projections, and to begin the work of disentangling these from our formal project responsibilities, and different approaches to the project requirements.

I had expected the collaboration we established while developing the project proposal to continue once the project had begun; and hoped that this would be a resource to support me in developing new consultancy practice. However in this collaboration I experienced myself as an unequal partner, with more to learn than to contribute. Paradoxically, the absence of collaboration as a developmental resource hardened my resolve to succeed in my consultancy within my client organisation. This was my first opportunity to attempt an organisation change intervention which used inquiry based methods If I had to do it without support from the project leader or partners, I determined that would. As I did, my confidence in my own competence in relation to the project leader grew. As my self-confidence grew, my projected dependency receded, and hostility diminished. Her interest and approval was important validation to me, and this she had given within the time boundaries of transnational meetings. I was aware that she represented in my mind the power of her organisation and that my desire to succeed in the eyes of this institution was an element of the power I had projected into her and of my sense of relative powerlessness.

As members of the editorial group in the third phase of the project, we discussed expectations commonly directed at women in organisations. Among the disabling factors we identified was the projection of a range of emotional needs onto women leaders and the expectation that they meet them, regardless of whether this was appropriate to their role in the organisation. Women leaders who resisted these expectations were objects of hostility from men and women alike. This coincided with the experiences described by refugee women managers in my first case study and with the desires and expectations shared in the second case study.

In my reflections on discussions in the editorial group, I re-appraised my interpretation of the dynamics enacted between project partners and project leader. My rage at the project leader for not providing a secure base for project partners to work from might be interpreted as a gendered expectation enacted in relation to a woman leader. As project partners, we wanted her to 'do gender' in a way which met our needs to be sustained. As project leader, she might choose to respond to this expectation in a variety of different ways. From this perspective, the interplay between partners' expectations and her way of leading the project could be interpreted as 'how partners and project leader did gender in relation to each other'.

Through this process of reflection I was able both to review my conceptual framing of the issues and move to a new subject position in relation to my own expectations and responses. I saw that her responses to partners and myself might have been a strategy to resist expectations that she viewed as gendered and inappropriate. This helped me to let go of expectations that my needs be met and in the process to feel less needy. I moved from a sense of dependency to a sense of greater felt equality. From this position I was better able to find my own voice and sustain a more independent position in relation to her on the editorial board.

As my sense of vulnerability to her responses receded, a stronger sense of having adequate skills and knowledge of my own moved into the foreground of my awareness. From this position I wrote a substantial section of the project publication, drawing from my discussions with transnational partners to engage with the political principles which had guided the consultancy interventions each had developed and making the case for multiple approaches to achieving gender culture change.

In the language of attachment, I had got back in touch with my capacity to sustain myself as an independent subject in relation to others. The process was similar to the process described in chapter 7, of moving myself from a position of 'seeking' belonging through attachment to others to an active sense of 'making' a place of my own. In the following section I conceptualise this process further.

It was not possible until the end of the Persephone project to discuss experiences of inter-subjective dynamics explicitly with colleagues or clients. I was nevertheless able to engage with the issues myself, using reflexive skills, drawing on research sources to test and expand my sense making and to develop and sustain an independent critical stance.

In completing this section I am left with a sense of self-indulgence and weariness. Was it only me who felt so intensely committed to collaboration and so intensely the pain of not achieving it? Were the emotional forces that buffeted me mine alone, or was I carrying them for the whole system? What conclusions from my inquiry can I draw concerning feminist collaboration?

To complete this cycle of my inquiry, I turn my attention the dynamics enacted between project partners and project leader.

Leadership between Women: gendered attachment

'They don't let me lead... '
Project leader, referring to project partners
'I've never experienced such a badly managed transnational project!'
Project partner, referring to project leader

During a general discussion about project findings at the final transnational meeting, the project leader remarked that women leaders are under constant pressure to lead 'in a certain way', for example to be 'not like men'.

I reflected that she might have experienced my expectations that she lead in a more collaborative way as refusal to allow her to lead at all. In my reflections I asked myself what leadership meant on a project with a politically inspired vision, which had to demonstrate results in the business environments of the funding and partner organisations. How could feminist collaboration work within such a partnership? How might it be reconciled with accountability to the funder and the practical constraints of the project?

While anecdotal stories abound of difficulties between women in mixed and women only organisations, research studies on these issues is practically non-existent. Most research on women's leadership is concerned in some way with gender difference, draws from data from mixed gender settings, and does not focus on the enactment of power and authority between women.

Feminist research studies of leadership in women's organisations are few and tend to focus on positive aspects of collaborative non-hierarchical working relationships (Brown 1992; Iannello 1992). However, collaborative leadership is not always generative and preference for non-hierarchical relationships may sometimes be a mask for an inability to accept the authority of a woman in a leadership role (Grant 2001; Riordan 1999). Recent research on governance in UK women's organisations describes frequent reports from women executives of being subverted by members of management committees and boards who appointed them (Grant 1999, 2001).

On the basis of her research with women and men who are managers and executives, Sinclair notes that our expectations of leadership are deeply embedded in cultural mythology, economic structures and social expectations. She maintains that powerful

unconscious forces as well as material interests are at work in maintaining women and men in traditional gender roles (1998: p. 180). During the period I was involved in the Persephone project I used psychodynamic approaches to organisation consultancy to explore ways of conceptualising my experience of project leadership. During the life of the project I took part in several experiential events that used psychodynamic approaches to explore leadership and authority in organisations. My experiences as a participant in these events had been a powerful reminder of the strength of resistance from men and women to women who broke with gender stereotypes in order to take up leadership roles. This had also been the experience of the women refugee managers who were the subjects of the research described in my first case study, chapter 9.

Some group relations research suggests that staff managed by women managers experienced increased dependency needs, and made demands for nurturing, care and protection which they did not make of male managers (Graves Dumas 1985). As a result women managers were placed in a double bind: if they responded to these needs they risked being undermined in their effectiveness in the wider organisation; if they resisted they met hostility and were undermined by their staff. As I have already noted, dependency needs in the transnational project were high and often focussed on frustrated expectations for support from the project leader.

During the project this dependency was masked by abundant practical reasons for dissatisfaction and anger. It seemed reductive to frame as 'high dependency needs' the very real resource and management issues about which partners were complaining. However at a meeting mid-way through the project the project leader referred to partners not responding to her communications and not putting in claims for expenses to which they were entitled. From her perspective they appeared to be creating difficulties for which they were blaming her and the lead organisation. This challenged my sense of reality. I explored the issues further with other partners but results were inconclusive and left me puzzled and uncertain.

Attachment research offered me an alternative conceptual framework for understanding the powerful dynamics enacted between project partners and the project leader (chapter 7). Within this framework the role of the project leader would have been to create a 'secure enough base', an environment in which participants experienced conditions conducive to creative work. Anger and withdrawal expressed by partners would have been read as evidence of anxious attachment, rather than over dependency. Productive leadership interventions within this frame might have focussed on providing practical

assistance for setting up consultancy projects, aiming to reduce anxiety and to encourage self-reliance.

In the second year of the project I drew from psychodynamic and attachment research to make the following analysis of the events that set the tone of dynamics between project leader and partners at the beginning of the project:

> *After the difficult start to the project, partners dealt with their insecurities by withdrawing into their own projects; transnational communication between meetings became virtually non-existent and meetings continued to be conflictual. All the signs of a dysfunctional work group described in psychodynamic research rapidly developed: fight/ flight and dependency were mobilised as defenses against anxiety, and also blocked effective working (Bion 1961). Individually held anxiety led to dysfunctional dependency, and in some cases envy of partners who appeared to be better resourced; this blocked collaboration, when inter-dependency based on shared ownership of anxiety might have promoted it.*
> Journal entry, project year 2

Using an attachment frame to make sense of these dynamics did validate my negative feelings in relation to the project leader. However they also locked me into self-righteous anger, when what I needed in order to take up a more pro-active role in the transnational project was to make a shift from dependence towards autonomy. In the previous part of this section I described how I make this shift and described the inner work which made this possible. This cycle of inquiry led me to a new question:

> *Do women - and men - have a* right *to expect their attachment needs to be met by women - or men - in positions of authority?*
>
> If so, *women leaders who wish to resist expectations based on gender stereotypes are faced with a paradox: how to provide a secure enough base for creative work when the meaning of 'secure enough' will be experienced by participants as nothing short of providing a nurturing, caring presence?*
>
> If not, *my inquiry suggests that women leaders and 'followers' may be stuck with powerful projections that have the potential to destroy collaboration between women.*
> Journal entry, project year 3

The under-resourced and under-valued nature of women's equality work seems likely to stimulate dependency needs which will lead to heightened expectations in relation to women in leadership roles. I have shown that I was able to contain destructive elements of my individual experience of these dynamics sufficiently to improve the quality of my relationship to the project leader and to try to increase scope for collaboration. This bore fruit in terms of self-care and self-development and had some effect in relationship to others. However this could not compensate for the cut made by the funder when the project was approved, which reduced funds for transnational development work that had been allowed in the original proposal.

In contrast the ELP transnational partnership was staffed by no less than three consultants. They held responsibility for facilitation and design of transnational exchange, partner communication between transnational meetings, and evaluation. In this project collaboration generated its own challenges but consultants did provide partners with support to build sufficient common ground to develop high levels of transnational collaboration. Cashflow was guaranteed by the lead partner organisation which was sufficiently well resourced to protect partners from delayed payments from the funder.

It would be tempting but missing the point to say that more efficient project management, collaborative leadership, and sufficient resourcing, would have enabled partners to sustain generative project relationships. Equality projects by their nature are about political change from a minority position, and are therefore often likely to take place in adverse conditions. Moreover equalities initiatives in employing organisations must balance business objectives and considerations with political vision. These challenges place stresses on relationships between women that provide the context for the projection of need and expectations for being sustained by women leaders. In this context women leaders and followers both need resources, skills, and commitment to work with the inevitable emotional and inter-subjective challenges that they will experience within their relationships.

In the following section, I explore these issues from the perspective of being the consultant leading a feminist change initiative within my client organisation. I uncover interesting parallels between the dynamics I experienced within the organisation and the dynamics I have described between the project leader and myself. I will return to these parallels in my conclusions to the chapter.

Section 4

An inquiry based feminist change intervention: the consultant's story

Part 1

Introduction

In this section I turn to the consultancy I carried out for ABC, my client organisation in the Persephone project.

In my overview of the transnational project I explained that the substance of the work of the project, to create methods and tools for sustaining women in leadership, was carried out in client/consultant 'pairs' of partners. In this section I explore the dynamics of power within the ABC client / consultancy relationship and within the 'coalition' of women with whom I worked in ABC. The complexity of the account reflects the shifting sands of equalities work, as different players sought to keep their agendas alive in an environment in which political priorities and their own positions were constantly changing.

This part of my inquiry was multi-layered. The first of these layers was the organisation consultancy that I conducted within ABC; this is described in the first two parts of this section. In the second of these layers I interviewed key players who had taken part in the project and invited them to reflect with me on their experience of the project. In the third part of this section I describe this process. Through this process, and in writing numerous drafts of this chapter, I developed my analysis and drew conclusions for my consultancy practice.

I begin with an overview of the ABC project. This overview consists of an introduction to the project and its key players, a summary of my consultancy activities, and an introduction to key dilemmas concerning how the project was positioned within the organisation.

In the second part of this section, *Using Inquiry to Confront Gendered Power*, I describe how I explored ways in which different players in the organisation enacted gendered power, and how this was expressed within the consultancy relationship.

In the third part of the section*: Power Authority and Trust between Feminist Change Agents,* I draw from interviews with key players in the consultancy project to explore and conceptualise divisions and solidarity between these women. I relate these to my use of 'coalition' as a method for sustaining women working towards gender culture change, and suggest that elements of my experience of client relationships seemed to mirror some of the dynamics between partners and the project leader in the transnational Persephone project.

A summary of the consultancy methodology I developed through this project is appended (appendix 1B). In the conclusions I draw together themes from the two inquiry tracks within this chapter.

Project overview

In the following I provide brief contextual details of ABC, key players in the ABC Persephone Project (PP), and the phases of consultancy activity. These are followed by an introduction to key themes I will explore in this part of my inquiry.

The ABC Persephone Project

ABC is a local authority located in an area of major industrial decline and high unemployment. The traditional culture of this area is paternalistic. As more women enter public life, this is slowly changing: in recent elections a high percentage of women were elected councillors and the female leader of the Council was re-elected.

Major re-organisations have occurred at ABC in the last few years. These included heavy budget cuts which significantly reduced the resources available for equal opportunities work. New legislation changed the political and organisational process of decision making, bringing both challenges and opportunities for the positioning of the Persephone project (PP) and for progress on its initiatives.

The PP ran three phases of activity. The **first phase** set out to identify and define barriers to women gaining access to and being sustained in leadership roles within ABC and to propose interventions to address these, with specific reference to the experience of black and minority ethnic women. In the **second phase,** action based interventions were developed and piloted; in the **third phase** results were evaluated.

The PP approach aimed to combine bottom up initiative by women employees with top down managerial and political support for change initiatives. In the first phase an inquiry-based approach was designed to stimulate participation from women and men in a range of different roles within the organisation. A Steering Group was formed to develop interventions. In the second phase, Steering Group members were trained as internal consultants; they developed a range of interventions, evaluated at an open staff conference that they organised in the final phase of the project.

The key players

Note: I have used pseudonyms to protect confidentiality

Bella Tang, former equalities training officer, developed the initial project proposal. She was a freelance training consultant who worked alongside me as external consultant to facilitate project events.

Aileen Bergman Head of Training and Equal Opportunities, was my client contact in the initial phase of consultancy. She was responsible for organising the PP Steering Group meetings to plan consultancy and for liaising with senior management. In the first phase of the project these managers were David Smith; in the second phase Jodie Green. Aileen was the link person for the PP transnational project; she was responsible for reports to the Persephone project leader and represented ABC at PP transnational meetings.

David Smith, Senior Executive, 'championed' PP in Phase 1 and continued to authorise and support its initiatives as part of the OD programme. Interested in 'learning organisation' initiatives, he chaired an OD Steering Group and offered tantalising potential for 'mainstreaming' the findings and proposals work of the PP project.

Jodie Green, senior corporate manager, with a background in gender equality work, was the first woman to be appointed at this level of seniority in the authority. Jodie took on the 'championing' role for PP at the beginning of phase 2, resourcing and supporting the activities of the Steering Group and integrating proposals into the organisation

development strategy for the reorganised council. Towards the end of the project her formal position changed as a result of another reorganisation and a politician, Anna Richie, took up the champion role.

The PP Consultants were a cross departmental group of women managers and employees acting as internal consultants to identify barriers to women in leadership, raise awareness of their effects and initiate activities to remove them. The group was formed at the end of the first phase of the project to initiate and evaluate interventions during the second and third phases of the project. The group had a formal brief and reporting line. Following re-organisation that took place at the beginning of phase 2, it was the only forum for women's equality initiatives. Members rely on support from senior management and politicians to authorise and support their activities.

Political support was provided by Marion May, former Chair of the Women's Committee and newly elected Mayor; Paula Strong, Leader of the Council, and Anna Richie, Lead Cabinet Member for Organisational Capacity. At the end of the PP project she was relocated to 'community affairs'.

ABC Consultancy objectives within phased activities

Phase 1

To identify barriers and solutions to sustaining and valuing women in leadership:

- 4 inquiry groups: women politicians; managers (women and men); women employees; disadvantaged employees: black and minority ethnic, lesbian and gay, disabled
- Staff conference
- Steering Group formed

Bella Tang and me plan and co-facilitate; Aileen Bergman (Head of Training and Equal Opportunities) organises; David Smith (Senior Executive, HR) authorises participation and Chairs Steering Group; Paula Strong, Leader of Council and other women politicians participate in staff conference.

Phase 2

To pilot consultancy methods to tackle barriers to women:

- Steering Group pilots sexual harassment awareness networks
- Consultancy skills training for Steering Group members
- Steering Group formally constituted and resourced; Action plan agreed

Bella Tang and me plan and co-facilitate training; Aileen Bergman (Head of Training and Equal Opportunities) organises training and services Steering Group; David Smith (Senior Executive, HR) authorises participation; Jodie Green (senior corporate manager) resources and contributes to Steering Group

Phase 3

To continue to pilot and to evaluate phase 2 methods:

- Steering Group organises rolling programme of 'roadshows' in every council site
- Evaluation conference with keynote Euro MP speaker
- Steering group members make presentation at final transnational meeting and present their findings and recommendations to senior management group

Roadshows are championed and led by Anna Richie (elected member) with Steering Group; the evaluation conference is organised by Steering Group members, resourced by Jodie Green, supported by Paula Strong and David Smith. I give keynote speech.

Mainstream or margins?

The following slice of inquiry illustrates how I used my inquiry at the end of the project to explore issues that had blocked collaboration during the project. It introduces the power dynamics that I explore in the following section:

A frustrating series of silences met my attempts to engage my clients in designing the first phase of the Project. These continued as the Project developed.

During research interviews I conducted after my consultancy role had ended, I explored with my client Aileen some of the conflicts that had been expressed through these silences. In these conversations, the dynamic between us seemed to shift out of the conflicted relationship it had become as we worked together as client and consultant into a more reflective and frank exchange. For me it was a relief to put words to some of the unnamed and painful power issues between us.

In one of these research discussions I had been astonished to hear Aileen describe my efforts to engage her in a collaborative design process at the beginning of the project as 'not getting value for money'; she believed it had been my job to do the design work. My efforts to negotiate an agreed work programme

were interpreted, I discovered in research discussions, as self-interest, an attempt to get more paid days from a cash-strapped client. The opportunity offered by the project to engage in a collaborative approach was blocked by perceived conflict of interest within the client / consultant relationship.

This struggle was lived out in our client /consultancy relationship throughout the project. At the core of this struggle lay our different aspirations for the Project.

Mine were to develop methods for surfacing and challenging gendered perceptions of women's leadership in organisations. I saw this as an opportunity to develop an organisation development based change intervention, moving beyond the scope and ideology of equal opportunities intervention that I saw as being based on a deficit model of women's skills.

My co-consultant Bella had drawn up the initial ABC Project design. In discussion we had seen this as an opportunity to get some form of accreditation or career advancement for women members of the black and other 'disadvantaged' focus groups she had initiated as equalities advisor for ABC. These focus groups that had a support and advisory function. Members of 'focus groups' often provided equalities expertise to managers, but were neither allowed additional work time nor rewarded for this.

Her former colleague Aileen agreed with this approach but her perspective was shaped by her position in the equal opportunities training section. Resources had been significantly cut since Bella had left, and Aileen was concerned that we set objectives that were achievable. As she explained, David Smith, senior executive who was championing the project, expected her to demonstrate results and would hold her responsible for failure. While there was no disagreement between us about content, there was disagreement about scope.

I was faced with a dilemma: to keep the project within the equal opportunities sphere, where we would have more control, but remain on the margins of the organisation; or to try to convince Aileen and Bella to secure senior management support to move it to a more mainstream location. In advocating for the latter course I hoped for a wider impact on general management practice.

A solution was offered by a senior woman manager, unfortunately on her way out of the organisation. With all of our agreement she negotiated to reposition the Project, moving its reporting lines from equal opportunities to organisation development, and thereby extending its scope and sphere of influence. We then used inquiry groups (see below) to build participation and ownership during the first phase of the project. Being an externally funded consultant gave me scope and confidence to innovate in a way which would not have felt possible had I been 'bought in' to work on a client defined contract. However to do so I had to 'sell' my vision of inquiry and build up trust and motivation with key players with whom I was to work.

My aim was to construct a working alliance that would allow senior manager Jodie to lead the Project as an organisation change initiative, working with the Steering Group. This would relieve Aileen from pressure to carry a Project that went beyond her sphere of influence, and provide organisational backing to take up the findings within the mainstream political and management structures. However, for it to work key players needed to construct a shared agenda and work plan, and this required that trust be built between them.

The key players in the Project, had all played leading roles in equal opportunities work in the organisation. When the Project started, relationships between them were shaped both by their formal power relations and by their shared history of working on women's' equalities issues. However Jodie's move from equalities into a general management position had undermined trust between them.

In the following two sections I describe my work with these issues on the project.

Part 2

Using Inquiry to confront gendered power

Phase 1

Surfacing women's knowing

The ABC project overview in the previous section refers to three phases of consultancy activity. In this part of my case study, I describe how I used inquiry in the first phase of the

ABC consultancy project, summarise the findings of the inquiry groups, and describe how I worked with this material at the staff conference at the end of phase 1.

I designed the first phase of the Project as an open inquiry process into barriers to women in leadership. In this phase Bella Tang and I planned and co-facilitated three inquiry groups for employees in the organisation and one for women politicians.

Participants were invited to discuss barriers to women in leadership, and organisational strategies for tackling them. These focus group discussions were then summarised by me, agreed with Bella, and discussed with Aileen and David. Prior agreement on confidentiality of material had been negotiated with participants.

I interviewed the leader of the council and briefed her about the key themes that had arisen from the inquiry group discussions. I described women politicians' accounts of how they perceived her leadership and obtained her agreement to address the staff conference, sharing some of her experience of barriers and how she had overcome them as woman leader of the council. Later in this part of the case study I describe how I framed her contribution to the conference. I presented the summaries of employee and manager inquiry group discussions to the staff conference at the end of this first phase of activity. While material from the politicians' inquiry group was not presented in its own right, it did inform my analysis and approach. Conference participants included but were not limited to members of focus groups. At the conference there was a further round of discussion of barriers and strategies.

My approach to the project design was inspired by my reviews of research literature exploring how women and men enacted gender in relation to each other and how gendered perceptions were structured through institutional power relations (chapter 8). In one of these accounts women and men explored their perceptions of gender relations within an organisation development project (van Beinum 1997). It was also informed by concepts of 'situated knowledge' developed by feminist researchers (chapter 2). I aimed to use inquiry groups to create spaces in which women and men could enter into a dialogue from their different positions. By focussing on how knowledge was 'situated' in relation to positions in the organisation and to gender identity, I hoped to reframe embattled positions and create space for dialogue.

I also hoped to surface hidden knowledge about gaps between equal opportunities policy and its implementation and to build up a momentum for gender culture change. I

anticipated that the process would uncover hidden resistance and hoped to explore this with participants in order to arrive at new understanding of how gendered power worked in their organisation. On this basis I hoped to develop strategies which would position barriers to women's leadership in the mainstream of organisation development. I was influenced by Gherardi's account of how men and women 'do gender', and of how meaning is constructed through their enactment of gendered power (Gherardi 1995).

Designing an intervention without clearly defined outputs required a high level of confidence. This approach was counter-cultural within ABC and a required a high level of risk for my clients as well as for me. I was encouraged in my approach by my reading of some practitioners of complexity theory who suggest that opening up a space for dialogue without preconceived agendas could be strategy for change (Griffin, Shaw and Stacey 1998).

The stories that were told in each inquiry group revealed a complex pattern of resistant and adaptive strategies that were enacted in a context of shifting gendered power relations. In a culture which they described as in transition from macho, paternalistic leadership to a 'listening learning organisation', managers and politicians said that they alike experienced conflict between espoused values and what was in practice needed to get things done. In a context where information was accessed and decisions made through informal networks, women and black people were strongly disadvantaged.

In my analysis of data from the inquiry groups I paid attention to the different ways in which participants made meaning of the dilemmas and experiences they were describing. I considered how to present material from the different groups in a form that would encourage dialogue, enable movement out of entrenched positions and open up opportunities for new alliances. Using Friere's notion of 'problematising' I decided to present material from each of the inquiry groups as a set of dilemmas experienced from different positions (Friere 1972, 1976). I hoped this would counter the strong sense of powerlessness of women and minorities that had emerged from the inquiry groups.

In the following paragraphs I illustrate how I worked with the material from the three employee inquiry groups. As I did not work directly with politicians in my consultancy I have not included their material here. My presentation was intended to convey the idea of 'situated knowledge'; to achieve this I highlighted contrasting statements and used the notion of paradox to encourage reflective, dialogic thinking rather than problem-solving in

subsequent discussion. The text below is selective and are not intended as summaries of the material discussed:

Inquiry group 1: Women and Men in Management

The view from the top: 'managing conflicting expectations'

- Elected members need quick decisions v ABC is a listening learning organization
- Managers need to 'blow a power hole' to get something done v ABC is committed to empowerment

Inquiry group 2: 'Disadvantaged' Focus Groups

The view from the margins: stolen expertise

- Focus group members are not taken seriously in professional roles: my word is not as important as my white / non disabled colleagues
- Expertise and time is 'stolen' by white colleagues who they educate about equalities and who gain promotion without passing on career opportunities.
- Image of 'minority communities and employees' continues to be negative: a drain on resources rather than a positive asset to ABC

Inquiry group 3: Women Employees

The view of women in the middle

- Management practice in ABC is poor: managers not knowing their staff, not valuing their work; not giving feedback, not praising
- Male managers seem unable to accept women as equal colleagues in the workplace; women do not experience themselves as valued
- Senior women undervalued by male colleagues, not allowed to be themselves, and isolated from each other
- Women expected to 'fit in' in to gain promotion rather than encouraged to contribute in their own way
- Some women believe that allying with a powerful man is a way to make progress. Some male managers seem to expect women to respond to their sexual advances.
- Women who work flexible hours are seen as less committed and excluded from career development
- Women believe many important pre decision discussions take place in male networks to which they have no access

I also wanted to convey the idea that participants themselves were enacting gendered power in the stories they told each other. I illustrated this idea at the conference by naming the representations of women that I had identified in inquiry group discussions:

Stories get told which perpetuate the culture

- 'Women are not interested in career opportunities'.
- 'Women do not choose to become leaders-they are invited to step in when no suitable man is available'.
- 'Women only progress when they are nice to powerful men who may choose to promote them'.
- 'Women, black and disabled people do not add values to ABC; we are helping them out through special services and equal opportunities'.
- 'The stories of women, black and disabled people who do contribute and who choose to take on leadership roles never get told'.

In order to convey a sense of choice in how representations were constructed, I decided to try to work with a story that had repeatedly been told to me of how the woman political leader of the council came to be elected. When listening to stories about her I had been struck by the contrast between her powerful influence and the way that her coming to power was portrayed. Women politicians had told me how they drew inspiration from her ways of asserting authority in relation to men in positions of power, and from her ways of making them feel valued. Men and women managers in their inquiry group described her as presiding over a local authority in transition from a 'power over' culture to a 'listening, learning organisation'. Yet the 'story' of her coming into leadership - repeated to me many times by participants and by the leader herself - was one of fortuitous circumstance, not ability:

My / her husband lost his seat

I had a hunch that this version of events both represented and reproduced the devaluing of women's leadership that the Project set out to challenge. The story acknowledged the ending of a regime yet refused to name women's agency in ending it. Thus at symbolic level it seemed to simultaneously deny the possibility of women willingly taking on a leadership role and neatly suggest a formula for making this impossibility possible.

I arranged to brief the leader before the conference. After discussing the issues with her I suggested that she try to 'tell a different story' in her presentation at the staff conference in order to illustrate herself in an initiating, leadership role.

At the conference I distinguished between level 1 (policy level) and level 2 (culture) change. I invited participants to engage with 'level 2 change', by focussing on the stories they told and how these might be devaluing women's leadership. I illustrated the power of story telling by telling a one myself:

> *'Queen Hapshepsput, Pharaoh of ancient Egypt, hired 3000 workers to raise the granite obelisk from the sand where it lay: 1000 men and women for manual labour, 1000 men and women to sing and dance for them, and 1000 to cook for them'.*

I chose this story to illustrate the power of this woman Pharaoh who had won respect, despite hostility directed against her because she was a woman, by combining attention to the welfare of her staff with technical expertise and economic success.

The material that participants generated in their inquiry groups and at the conference certainly did tell stories of how gendered power was enacted in the organisation which contrasted dramatically with its public face of high profile, progressive equal opportunities policy initiatives. The inquiry process brought women politicians, employees and managers together for the first time, mobilised political support for the project, and inspired 20 women to come forward to joint a Steering Group to pilot the second phase.

However there was also a shadow side to this process, and a cost to women who took part.

At the staff conference both my co-consultant and I experienced strong bodily and emotional sensations of dread and anxiety during discussions of sexual harassment. These seemed to mirror reports that were made at the women employees' inquiry group of women being sexually harassed but not wanting to name it; becoming ill and being intimidated when they attempted to complain.

As sexual harassment was discussed at the conference, our knowledge of danger was literally embodied. My co-consultant said she had to over-ride a strong impulse to stop the process, and walk away. Memories had surfaced of distressing experiences of being

marginalised as a black employee and of the censoring of her work on sexual harassment. We shared and interpreted these experiences as evidence that we had broken a powerful organisational taboo against bringing this knowledge into the public arena and of the risks around breaking the silence of women who had experienced sexual harassment. Many of these women had attempted unsuccessfully to challenge unwanted sexualised interactions with managers, and at least one of them had since left the organisation.

The act of breaking taboo, of bringing a reality into the public arena which had been lived out 'in private' and shared by women who had challenged harassment, required courage, encouragement and a leap of faith by the women who were willing to speak about it at the conference. These women had stated that it was the act of coming together in a woman only inquiry group that had made a difference to them and had opened up the possibility of using the project to take collective action. In this inquiry group they had shared information, put together a picture of what was happening across different 'functions' within the council, and constructed shared knowledge. It had also required resilience and political skill to facilitate trust and mutual support between women participants and to create an appropriate forum within which they felt able to speak out.

The staff conference:
Confronting Resistance and taboo

The staff conference was attended by 80 employees, including eight senior men, and several women politicians. Two of these women politicians had taken part in the inquiry groups and were in strategic positions to progress the findings of the inquiry. They lent their support, and in her address to the conference the leader of the council made a statement of support for the second phase of the project. Twenty women responded to an invitation to join a project steering group. The scene seemed to have been set, I believed, for a powerful lobby to insist on a range of initiatives to tackle the organisational barriers identified in the first phase of inquiry, and to explore scope for implementing some of the proposed strategies for removing them.

These initiatives could, I thought, be channelled through the organisation development (OD) subgroup, to which the Project had a reporting line, and be supported within political structures by women elected members who had taken part in the Project. The Steering

Group could choose an area to work on and we could together design an intervention to pilot in the second phase of the Project.

However at this point Aileen powerfully challenged my vision. There were no organisation resources to fund my further consultancy involvement; I was not invited to Steering Group meetings, and at a transnational Project meeting she stated that I had demonstrated that I could not be trusted to attend to her need to design a small, do-able Project. She did not see it as within her power or the remit of the Steering Group to ensure the material generated in phase 1 was taken up, and instead encouraged the Steering Group to focus on one specific area: sexual harassment.

I was devastated at losing the breadth of material generated in the inquiry groups, and had misgivings about prioritising sexual harassment. While it was a powerful motivator, it was also a dangerous and vulnerable area for women employees to work in, and the most entrenched. Would this confirm our positioning as another time-limited 'woman's project' and leave mainstream management practices untouched?

During research discussion at the end of the project, Aileen and I were able to establish the dialogue I had sought in my consultancy role. Reflecting on why she had not felt comfortable with the open process, she remarked that although normally this would be her preferred way of working she had felt too vulnerable to criticism if she was not seen to produce results.

> *I kept taking leaps of faith, but each time felt you were trying to get more work from us.*

This discussion which took place outside our consultancy relationship enabled me to make a very different interpretation of the power dynamics enacted between us at this turning point in the consultancy:

The organisation had powerfully excluded the Persephone project from the mainstream of its concerns and kept it on the margins as a specialist 'women's' project. However this posed interesting paradoxes.

As I showed at the beginning of the section, during these research discussions at the end of the project Aileen indicated that she had perceived my attempts to negotiate a work programme for the project as self-seeking, equivalent to the approach of male consultants

with whom she had to deal. The 'leaps of faith' which she had taken required her to risk being blamed for not delivering to goals which were beyond her powers and to which others, including me, could not be trusted to work.

Sexual harassment was an area of policy and practice in which she held responsibility; in selecting it as a priority area for intervention she was moving the project into a territory in which she had power and authority. However sexual harassment was unambiguously a 'women's issue' and not seen as a 'mainstream' organisational concern.

In the following section I show how I worked with these dilemmas in the final phases of the project.

Phase 2

Discourses of power: breaking silence

Throughout the Project I experienced unusually high levels of anxiety which I had to 'hold' on my own. I interpreted this as a sign that we were breaking invisible taboos, confronting silences and resistance. I used psychodynamic conceptual frames to interpret this, testing my sense making with my co-consultant and in discussion with participants at group relations events I attended. However opportunities for contact with clients and my co-consultant were limited by budget and my clients did not respond to my attempt to involve them further. I found that I was building up an analysis based on an intensive process of meaning-making of my own. I felt frustrated and blocked, unable to bring my thinking into either the client organisation or the transnational project.

After an interval of time, I put together a proposal for consultancy during phase 2 of the project, tailored to our limited budget, and negotiated agreement with Aileen, Bella and Jodie. This proposal took up the issue of women's hidden contribution to the organisation by positioning Steering Group members as organisation consultants. Naming their contribution as consultancy would, I hoped, begin to change the story of 'disadvantage' that was associated with their ongoing initiatives and name their expertise and contribution to the organisation. In making this proposal I was acting on the material generated by the first phase of inquiry. This had illustrated powerfully a consistent pattern of rendering invisible the initiatives taken by employees who were women, black or from other minorities.

Two two-day consultancy skills development sessions were agreed, one of which focussed on black and white women working together, and one on sexual harassment. An evaluation conference was to be organised by the Steering Group as the final event of the project.

As I worked alongside my co-consultant I became aware of contrast between our personal empowerment and organisation change approaches. I held the vision of organisational change, and worked with participants to envision the remit, mission and position of the Steering Group within the formal power structure of the organisation. Bella held the vision of individual empowerment, and worked with participants to affirm a sense of their self-esteem and capacity for action, and to distinguish this from position power. This approach seemed to reaffirm a sense of purpose and agency, and build solidarity. For example, asked what strategies they used to give themselves confidence when challenged or challenging a male senior manager, several women on the consultancy skill course said:

Imagine him naked!

By the end of the second phase of the project, the coalition I had envisioned seemed to have been established. Jodie had agreed to resource and provide practical and strategic support to the Steering Group over a time limited period. Participants had established an independent Steering Group and named themselves the 'PP consultants'. They had practical support from women in positions of power in senior management and political structures. My consultancy input had come to an end; I had only to attend the evaluation conference that they undertook to organise.

Over the next six months, the Steering Group met and despite depleted and irregular participation organised a successful evaluation conference with the help of the woman senior manager. Anna, the woman politician associated with the project, then enthusiastically took up leadership of the Steering Group. Her leadership seemed to sustain flagging momentum and raised the profile of the project. She initiated a 'roadshow' which she took to every council workplace, inviting women to identify barriers to women in the organisation and to make suggestions for overcoming them, building on the phases one and two. This was the first time women-only workplace meetings had been held; they raised the profile of the project and increased participation. Her leadership effectively sustained Steering Group members and embedded ownership and

commitment to the project in the organisation. This was timely as it coincided with the final months of the transnational project.

The issue was now sustainability. Would the fragile relationship between women managers and employees hold? Differences between Steering Group members had surfaced but had not been addressed and participation was variable. Work was needed to consolidate membership and leadership within the group. Would Steering Group members be able to hold on to a change agency perspective, braving the risks of increased vulnerability, or fall back into a more defensive and safer position? Much would depend on their ability to resist pressures to be revert to the equal opportunities mould and to find channels for 'mainstreaming' their issues within management and organisational practice. In this, their relationship with the woman senior manager and the women politicians would be pivotal, but so would their ability to develop their own leadership. In the next section I explore these issues.

Part 3

Power, authority and trust: between feminist change agents

In this section of my inquiry I critically evaluate my use of the concept of 'coalition' as a strategy for feminist consultancy. This part of my inquiry began at the end of the second phase of the Persephone project, and in the evaluative phase of my consultancy with ABC.

I invited key participants in the ABC to take part in interviews that would contribute to my PhD research. In my invitation, I made it clear that I was offering an opportunity to reflect on the consultancy project and on project relationships outside of our contractual relationships. My invitation was circulated to members of the ABC PP Steering Group, to senior manager Jodie; to Aileen, lead contact for ABC on the transnational project, and to Anna, the politician who took on from Jodie the lead role on the Steering Group. Three members of the Steering Group, and Anna, Aileen and Jodie all accepted my invitation. Jodie organised a timetable for the interviews and as a result I conducted a group discussion with three Steering Group members and Aileen, an interview based discussion with Jodie and her senior woman manager colleague; and overlapping discussions with Aileen and Anna.

During discussions I used a topic guide, designed to enable exploration of ABC project participants' perceptions of the nature of the 'coalition' they had created through the project, across organisational divisions, and of what they had achieved. I took notes during discussions, asked and was given permission to use this material in my research, and circulated transcripts of discussions to each participant. I invited feedback on the transcripts and in response one participant, Aileen, expressed concerns concerning confidentiality. I explored these with her and agreed ways of working with the data which would adequately protect her. I have addressed these within the text of my case study.

In my discussion with Steering Group (SG) members all, except one new member present, expressed how vulnerable they felt as initiators of change. Their key issues concerned trust: could they trust that they had adequate senior level support to carry through the project initiatives? One facet of this was their need to have sufficient time to explore their issues and arrive at an agreed collective agenda to act upon. Difficulties were, being allowed enough time to develop this in an organisational environment in which time had to be justified on the basis of results and which devalued reflection. Senior level authorisation was needed in order to take time out, and in order to deliver results, and this meant there was a constant risk of being used to support the unknown agendas held by their senior supporters. It was difficult to sustain momentum in a culture where equal opportunities initiatives were often high profile but did not lead to more than surface change; were more often 'flashes in the pan' that enhanced profile without challenging existing power relationships.

In the predominantly macho gender culture, women were seen to sustain their positions by adapting and therefore to be unlikely to support, and more likely to sabotage, any counter cultural initiatives. In discussion Steering Group members expressed a feeling of wariness, anticipating that support from women with position power could at any moment be withdrawn when it no longer served their individual interests. From this perspective coalition would be too strong a word to describe their relationship with senior women; alliances with them would necessarily be shifting.

> Me: *How would you like Jodie or Anna to be in the meetings...*
> SG1 and SG3: *We don't know how they fit what we are saying into their agenda.. or do they just expect us to fit into theirs? Are our needs really being met?*

There was ambivalence about the nature of senior support, but also ambivalence about how much authority these women in positions of power really had. Their support was felt

to be vital, yet still insufficient to authorise the participation of SG members. The Project in its reporting lines was part of the 'mainstream' structure of the council; following deletion of the Women's Committee in the latest restructure, it was the only place with an explicit brief for women's equality within the formal structure. Yet authorisation to attend SG meetings still had to be given on a piecemeal basis by the male senior manager, and even then was not considered by line managers to be a legitimate part of their staff's workload, so that for some members SG meetings had a quality of being 'in secret.' It was as if despite their formal positions of power, the women who publicly sponsored the project, a senior manager, a senior politician, and the leader of the council simply were not seen by line managers as having the authority to provide institutional backing.

What then was the nature of the support that Steering Group members perceived to be of value to them? How did this match the support that the women in positions of power were able to give to the Project? In my interviews I explored this with Jodie (senior manager) and Anna (politician).

In discussions with ABC PP participants I had used the term 'coalition' to describe the relationships they were establishing through the ABC PP. At the evaluation conference which concluded my consultancy input, Jodie had used this term to refer to these relationships. However in discussion in her interview she took a expressed a more qualified view:

> Me: *So - the idea of coalition that I introduced - between women in different positions - does that have any meaning for you at the moment?*
> *J: No is the short answer!*
> Me: *But remember we both used the term at the evaluation conference –*
> J: *umm um..*
> Me: *At that point you were saying [in your presentation] that a coalition had been established between women politicians and ...women lower down and yourself...*
> J: *I should just say though* there is coalition on some issues (emphasis)... *It's like a spectrum ...there are some issues it's easy to achieve coalition around and then at the other end there are some issues that nobody.... That you are never going to get that coalition ....so you have to recognise that would be some areas that it's easy there are some where it's not.*

When I asked Jodie how she now perceived her contribution to the Steering Group, she described the support she had provided for six months after the consultancy training

sessions as 'kick-starting the group.' After this period she felt she had followed through by providing 'behind the scenes support to Anna as lead politician supporting the Steering Group, in order to 'make sure things are taken seriously [by managers] in the organisation'.

While Jodie described her relationship to the Steering Group as relatively straightforward, I have shown that some Steering Group members described their relationship to her as more complex and difficult. In my research discussion they expressed fears that she might withdraw and doubts that they could trust her, or by implication any woman manager with power in the organisation, to work to an agenda which addressed their needs. There was a 'them and us' approach, which associated position power with self-interest. Women's position power was perceived to be precarious, and women in positions of power were seen as necessarily preoccupied with agendas associated with their own survival or progression within the wider organisation.

I explored with these three members of the Steering Group what it would mean for Jodie to meet their needs:

> SG3: *Jodie's style of working is difficult.. did not make me feel included any more...*
> Me: *Hasn't Jodie opened up opportunities for the Steering Group to be represented on various working groups, to influence policy?*
> SG1*: I haven't experienced Jodie opening up channels for involvement of the Steering Group in policy...I do not feel included in structures which value my contribution. Where do I fit into any of these gatherings? Where will I be valued? What are the other agendas which are influencing senior women who are involved?*

For these Steering Group members, being involved in policy meant a sense of inclusion based on being valued; their disappointment and lack of trust in Jodie seemed based on her failure to provide this for them and on her failure to demonstrate that she valued them herself. In expecting Jodie to provide this valuing in the organisation members are both attributing her with power to achieve this and imagining that she is withholding use of these powers on their behalf.

Steering Group members wanted Jodie to create an environment in which their contribution would have been invited and valued. But the attribution to her of the power to

achieve this, in contrast to their own felt powerlessness, seemed to prevent them from seeing or taking up the opportunities she had provided. Their desire for her support seemed to underpin and to be an expression of their feeling of comparative powerlessness. In this sense it was a desire for a kind of support which was not adapted to their becoming more agentic in the environment described by Jodie.

In Jodie's account women in positions of power must demonstrate ability to look after themselves. At this level, women can and do legitimately ask and expect for help from each other, using organisation position power, but must also recognise that no one can reasonably be expected to risk their position. Help can be requested, but this must be done judiciously and with regard to each other's position within the wider organisation and need to work to wider agendas.

> Me*: So using political and other networks is really vital?*
> Jodie: *Yes but one of the things is that I have to be wise about which issues I take through the political network, because at the end of the day the leader [of the council] will get heartily sick of me constantly knocking on her door saying 'I'm being excluded', because she sees me as someone who should just get on with it.*
> Me: *Hold your own....*

This perception is congruent with the observation of Steering Group members: for women to survive and get on in this environment means adopting adaptive strategies, or taking your chances.

> SG member: *This might have to do with the sexualised climate you spoke about [ref. to report back at end of phase 1]...we are still in the aftermath of x [previous chief executive].*
> Me. *How would you describe that x way of being?*
> SG member: *Very male, bullying, power over, withholding information.... Women are very good at adapting to the predominant norm...to create safety, survive...women get to the top if they flirt or act like males...the chances of getting female support are very limited as we are a threat to that way of working and being.*

But this generalisation about women's adaptive strategies belied the fact that through the PP some women had taken up positions of solidarity for each other, and that some women at senior level had used their position power to support the initiatives that had

been taken. I speculated that some Steering Group members' desire for unconditional support and protection from their senior women supporters, and their disappointment that it had not been given, may have made it more difficult for them to work with Jodie on the conditional basis which she was able to offer. This interpretation was suggested by a conversation with a participant in the consultancy training days, when a participant responded to my encouragement to work with X with an emphatic:

But can we trust her?

The reality that trust between feminists in work settings must be conditional, and not total, is one that I too experienced as painful during my work on the PP, despite political and intellectual knowledge. I explored this in the first part of this chapter and in other parts of my inquiry (chapters 9 and 12). Characterising women who withhold support as in some way untrustworthy may be a defence against the pain of acknowledging separate individual interests, despite shared political values, and of having to do the political work of negotiating areas of common interest. Until this work of separating is done there can be no firm basis for building feminist alliance.

Is there any hope then for feminists who wish to work in coalition in mainstream organisations on a women's' equality agenda? Is the idea of 'coalition' at all useful in this context?

In this case women, lower down the hierarchy did succeed in forging alliances with senior managers who supported their agenda and with politicians. But these alliances were limited by individual women's vulnerability in an environment where women's authority was constantly eroded, and there was a necessity to protect their positions. In this situation a senior woman could and did open doors but did not do more. But women lower down were looking for more; for a guarantee that, once they spoke, they would be welcomed and valued.

Newly elected women politicians who attended the inquiry group at the beginning of the ABC project also described this desire and experience of being devalued. They described difficulties in asserting their authority to male managers and the importance of their woman leaders' modelling of challenge and confrontation. Outside the management culture of the organisation, the two women politicians who took part in Steering Group meetings brought an approach based on shared problems and issues and an informality which was both appreciated and resisted by other members of the Steering Group:

Me: *Do you think the Steering Group members understand what your position is in the council, that you have power?*
Anna: *Yes they do recognise our power as elected members - they said 'be quiet you are our role models!' when we were sharing a joke at the meeting...At meetings I feel the same as the other women; I forget that we have different power in the council... We are all equal; no matter where you come from in the organisation we are trying to improve things for all women; it's how we use our different positions outside the group which makes the difference.*

The leadership provided by the woman politician was associated with a common struggle, women together within a safe space, within which knowledge was shared and a common perspective assumed. In this space, women were able to value and affirme each other as long as they set aside their position power and associated roles.

However this safety was sometimes maintained by ignoring difference of opinion or challenge. Differences of opinion were often not expressed openly at SG meetings, and feedback from SG members indicated that some members who did not feel identified with predominant voices withdrew their participation. Some members felt a pressure to be results orientated before they were ready. When Jodie challenged SG members to be more results and action orientated her interventions were received with ambivalence:

SG3: It is different when Jodie is here, partly inhibiting, partly connecting...Jodie has a drive to make everything action related...to expect us to say what things are for... its harder to think out loud...

To be effective and to achieve their goals, the Steering Group needed to do more than to provide a place of safety; they also needed to plan and evaluate interventions, to demonstrate results. This latter way of working was more in tune with management culture and assumed a sense of confidence in ability to deliver and of power to effect change. To achieve this SG members would have had to cross a border, staking a claim to having something important to contribute in the mainstream of organisational practice.

Jodie's leadership and my consultancy interventions aimed to enable SG members to cross the border from being recipients to being initiators of change, and from framing their concerns as implementation of equal opportunities to challenging wider management practice. But this had raised ambivalent feelings in SG members. The margins of equal

opportunities held a safety that could not be guaranteed in the shifting power dynamics in the mainstream of the organisation. Jodie could not guarantee unlimited support to the Steering Group, and both she and Anna lost the positions towards the end of the project that had enabled them to 'mainstream' the material generated by the project.

Part 4

Inquiry skills for coalition and consultancy

I began this consultancy by attempting to reposition the ABC Persephone project, moving it from equal opportunities to organisation development (OD). In doing so I was determined to assert that valuing women's leadership was a mainstream organisational development and not a marginal equal opportunities issue. On the surface I succeeded; the PP Consultants group was formally constituted, and received political and managerial support. I was allowed to develop and implement a methodology which used inquiry to build wide participation and which brought staff and politicians together for the first time. An innovative rolling programme of women only staff meetings was initiated, and these confirmed the findings of my first cycle of inquiry. Women were able to use the spaces created by inquiry to break silence in taboo areas, and came forward to act on the results.

However the work of taking up the issues which were identified by members of the inquiry groups in the 'mainstream' of ABC management practice relied on PP participants' use of position power and ability to work 'in coalition'.

In my inquiry I explored the issues which arose between women who came together across different positions in the political and managerial system. I found a complex set of expectations and desires in relation to leadership. These reflected both a need for a place of refuge in a hostile system and a desire to act as change agents. The Steering Group needed champions, a protector figure, and challenge to develop the skills to become more self-reliant. However women with position power were themselves vulnerable to attack, and could not guarantee unconditional support.

The ABC PP project had set out to address the specific barriers experienced by members of the 'disadvantaged' focus groups which had been initiated prior to the PP by Aileen and by my co-consultant Bella. However while black women did participate in all of the consultancy events, and speak from their specific experience, they saw the focus group for black employees rather than the PP as their main focus of activity. Their time for new

activities was limited by extra responsibilities relating to their role as members of the focus group, providing expert advice to managers on equal opportunities issues.

I had discovered that formal positioning of the PP 'in the mainstream' of ABC was not enough either to persuade managers to introduce gender issues into organisational development initiatives that were running parallel to the Persephone project, or to address them within mainstream management practice. The place of women's initiatives in ABC was 'equal opportunities'. Through a series of events initiated by my client contact Aileen, and by players outside the project, the Persephone project remained positioned outside the mainstream, despite its sponsorship by the leader of the council.

Each of these 'places' in the structure carried their own discourses and practices, and each implied a specific set of values and approaches to change. The women associated with equal opportunities, corporate management, or politics each held and spoke from a perspective shaped by these practices, values and change models. As consultant I moved between them. I had hoped that coalition between the women located in these different 'places' would enable each to 'see' the world from the other's position, and to take account of the situated knowledge they were each carrying.

In the following transcript, Jodie took a long term view of sustainability of the Persephone project and explored the inter-relationship between her role on the project and recent changes in her own position:

> Me: *What do you think is the key to sustaining the momentum of The Project now?*
> J: *Championship: having people like Anna (woman politician) championing it, and maintaining it so a critical mass builds up, because [otherwise] it will have no credibility. Bearing in mind it's the first time there have been workplace discussions for women only, there has to be some reaction and follow through, and that's going to be the problem.*
> Me*: Do you feel, because you did a lot of work using the material generated in the first phase and tried to incorporate it in the policy papers you wrote, that you succeeded in using that material in the restructuring, and that it has somehow influenced it?*
> J. *Not really... I think its probably served to alienate me to the extent that I have now been really marginalised in the restructuring --- So all of the work I have put in to lots of the policy dimension in the organisation is still all there on paper .....but the reality is we've still got a huge journey to travel.*

Me: *Are you saying that your position is worst because of the project?*
J: *Not just because of the project - my position is worse because of a changing set of factors - - but its moving [and changing] so 2 years' time I might be back on the ascendancy; you never know!*

According to this longer-term view, empowerment of individuals and an ability to develop a systemic and political organisational analysis would be needed to achieve gender culture change. I would add that in the meantime coalition between women would be fragile and need careful maintenance. Leadership would need to enable differences and inequalities to be acknowledged and addressed. Notions of limited conditional trust would need to be cultivated and made explicit. Working arrangements would need to be reviewed in the light of changing political circumstance and the needs of individuals to protect their positions.

Practices developed by feminists engaging in 'transversal politics' might be well adapted to this context. Developed by women working to build feminist political alliances across divides in war zones, these feminist political practices allow women to back off areas of difference of identity, opinion, ideology or custom that become too explosive to discuss during times of conflict. Instead of focusing on conflict and difference they focus on the common ground which they have built in order to sustain trust and alliance (Cockburn 1998; Yuval Davies 1999).

These women have learned from necessity that trust cannot be absolute between individuals who are members of communities in conflict. Relationships that acknowledge areas in which differences cannot be resolved, due to membership of communities in conflict, can be sustained even in times of war. I suggest that feminist women seeking to work in coalition from different positions in organisations need to make a similar distinction. Conflicts of interest that are structural belong to the survival needs of individuals within a conflicted environment. Expectations of trust may not be appropriate but belong to the shared territory that has been constructed between women, within which conflicts can be negotiated.

I used my inquiry to work with inter-subjective dynamics in relation to my clients in order to construct and maintain shared territory within which my consultancy to the ABC PP could take place. In my inquiry I tried to cultivate my awareness of the power of the symbolic in constructing women's relationships to each other and gender relations within ABC (Gherardi 1995). I drew from this awareness, as well as my feminist political analysis and

psychodynamic practice, in order to construct sufficient common ground to enact my vision of 'coalition'.

In the following section I explore further what this meant for my understanding of feminist consultancy practice.

Part 5

Silences and disappearing acts

In this part of my inquiry I set out to discover what it meant to be a feminist consultant in a mainstream organisation.

To write this case study, I have had to re-engage with accumulated distress and to do this, I have worked through considerable resistance. Ending the project had been a relief; project achievements were well described in project reports. I was ambivalent about reawakening memories of anxiety, of conflict, of vulnerability. How could I find a way into this material that would be generative to me, and of value to my inquiry?

I began to think again about blocks that I had experienced in relation to my women clients and subsequent revelations that they had seen me and at different moments the senior woman manager with whom I was working, as 'other', 'not us'. Who had I been acting for in their eyes? Was I 'for the organisation' or 'for the women', 'for them' or 'for us' in relation to partners on the project team?

These questions opened up a stream of thinking about the meaning of the silences, of the unspoken, in the consultancy process. In this final section I make my own reading of these silences, drawing from feminist research.

In writing this part of my case study, I explored the contours of these silences as a way of exploring how to do feminist consultancy. In doing so, I positioned myself as a feminist researcher, asserting subjectivity at the core of my inquiry and reflexive practices at the core of my methodology (Marshall 1995,1999; Stanley and Wise, 1993). Crafting this case study has challenged me to override powerful drives to keep silence, reminding me of the personal risks of bringing my subjectivity explicitly into professional relationships. In the process, I have become more sharply aware of the difficulties in putting together

discourses belonging to the world of organisations and those belonging to the worlds of women in organisations.

The feminist project of `gendering organisational analysis` (Mills and Tancred 1992) offered an approach to bringing these discourses together. Research studies which adopt this perspective explore how gender and sexual divisions are produced through the gender neutral language of organisation studies, and how gendered power can be reproduced and enacted by individuals through apparently gender neutral management practices and interactions. I have shown that the inquiry groups that I ran in the first phase of consultancy in ABC generated abundant evidence that supported this approach.

However, when I attempted to act on this approach in the second phase of the ABC PP I was confronted by a paradox. I found myself blocked by my client who held responsibility for equal opportunities, for whom the priority was to design an intervention that would produce results. From her perspective, the only way to make a difference was to keep the project within the territory of equal opportunities within which she had some managerial power and control. Extending the project's focus to general management practice would require direction from a more senior level, but her experience indicated that neither male nor female general managers could be trusted to address gender or race inequality within mainstream general management practice. The inquiry groups had produced an analysis of how women's inequality was enacted and reproduced through mainstream management practice. However, to move the project into the territory of general management required acting in alliance with senior management and risking loss of control of the project to general management agendas. Thus it seemed that although the analysis clearly located responsibility for addressing barriers to women with general management, it could only reliably be acted on a way that framed the issues in terms of 'equal opportunities'. However as a specialist function within the organisation, designed to address disadvantage, equal opportunities was unable to confront the 'male standard' that was embedded in general management practice. Feminist researchers continue to identify the resilience of this standard, and its effects in positioning women as 'out of place', travellers in a male world (Gherardi 1995; Marshall 1984, 1995; Wajman 1998). However, this research also, as I have demonstrated, offers hope that women and some men are persisting in enacting leadership and gender differently (chapter 8).

The inquiry groups revealed and mapped how this male standard was reproduced and upheld in ABC, and through the collaboration which Steering Group members established with Jodie, the senior manager, and Anna, the politician, they did name and challenge

barriers to women in ABC. They used the project to move beyond the equal opportunities frame for women's inequality, developing the 'roadshows' as their own form of inquiry, and presented their findings to senior management. Their findings confirmed the patterns identified in my analysis of the inquiry groups of phase 1.

A recent research study demonstrated that there is no clear pathway for moving from gendering organisational analysis to gendering organisational practice (Acker 2000; Meyerson and Kolb 2000). In an inquiry based on a consultancy intervention in a manufacturing company, consultants could not hold together the business and gender equality objectives of the project (Coleman and Rippin 2001). The gender culture was reproduced, ironically, within the woman only production team which women employees successfully initiated. In ABC, inquiry findings relating to general management practice were at first rejected as areas for intervention, and sexual harassment prioritised. While this was undoubtedly a priority area for women, it also removed the challenge directed towards general management to examine their role in reproducing gendered power relationships. The project was effectively identified with 'women' rather than with 'organisation' and could safely be left to women to lead. In mobilising position power across political and managerial structures, women developed a form of collaborative leadership. They challenged predominant representations of women and enabled women to assert alternatives based on their own experiences of management and leadership. In positioning themselves as consultants, they rejected the notion of 'disadvantage' and took up a new position as experts.

Working with my source material, I concluded that in my consultancy to ABC different ways of knowing and sets of knowledge claims had pulled me apart. I had tried to reconcile the gender-neutral language of the organisational world with its shadow side, the world inhabited by women in the organisation and women's accounts of this world that they had shared within my inquiry. I became more conscious of their edges, more skilful at moving between these two worlds. In chapter 12 I develop the metaphor of 'border-crosser' to explore this ontological experience of crossing between territories:

> *In which some voices sound, resound, more than others, and in which echo connotes power.*
> (Stanley 1997: vii)

In writing this case study the conceptual frames I took up to make sense of the material continued to shift and change. I moved between the lenses of feminist inquirer and

organisation development consultant and actively engaged in dialogue with others. I struggled to arrive at a story that reconciled discordant values embedded in discourses associated with each of these and with their associated worlds. I experienced this struggle as an ontological one, asking myself and reflecting in conversation with others: what does it mean to be a feminist organisation consultant, and inquirer? On what value base are my consultancy relationships constructed? How can I build them on a foundation which reflects my politics, as well as working with the realities of power / role difference and of my business and professional needs?

I had aspired through my work on the ABC Persephone Project to become an OD consultant, able to move beyond the limitations of an equal opportunities specialist approach. To achieve this I had to hold the tension between these worlds. In my consultancy relationships within ABC, the discourses of management and of organisational development often clashed with the voices of the women with whom I worked, and with feminist discourses of empowerment, of sexually and gender specific power dynamics. In the transnational project I tended to voice and hold the feminist political values and practices embedded in the project objectives and design, while the project leader held and spoke to the organisational accountabilities of partners, from the organisation development approach of her organisation. These different discourses often seemed to represent conflicting expectations held by partners, and clashes were often enacted through a series of silences and miscommunications. Each discourse resonated with different parts of myself; as a woman, as a feminist, as an organisation change consultant. These conflicts triggered a din of anxiety, of self-searching and of analysis, drawing from a variety of conceptual frames and external sources.

Harlow, Hearn and Parkin use the concepts of silence, din, and 'gendered noise' to explore overt and covert gendered domination within organisations (Harlow, Hearn and Parkin 1995:105). They extend this analysis to the din of certain kinds of organisation theory and the silence of others, leading to conceptual constraints. They note for example that gendered power cannot be reduced to the formal and informal structures of the 'gendered organisation', but is much more complex, subtle and paradoxical (1995: 104).

In this inquiry, I have shown that much of my own experience as a feminist consultant, and the experiences of women with whom I worked, were unspeakable within organisational contexts. On the transnational project, project leadership did not allow subjectivity to be expressed or explored within the work of the project. Within the client organisation, sexuality and sexual harassment were 'taboo' subjects. In my role as

feminist inquirer, I have acted as a breaker of silence in order to open dialogue and challenge power regimes that blocked feminist collaboration. In both cases it would have been easier to keep silence. As I have shown, the personal cost in terms of vulnerability, as well as the developmental rewards of placing subjectivity at the centre of my inquiry methodology have been high.

As feminist research has suggested, silence and voice can be at once acts of resistance and surrender, constructed through the complex nature of relationships in which they occur (Cockburn 1991; Gatenby and Humphries 1999). During my work on this project I learned to interpret my client's silence in response to my attempts to engage her in collaborative work, as a strategy of resistance and self-protection. Silence in this instance was a strategy employed by women who saw themselves as less powerful in relation to others they perceived as powerful, and untrustworthy. As a consultant in a position of power I experienced being on the receiving end of this silence as painful; later in the project I was able to break through it by using inquiry to step outside consultant / client roles, into more reciprocal relationships. In contrast, within the transnational project I used my research role to break silence and speak through it from a position of comparatively less power. In doing so, I considered the risks associated with of making myself professionally vulnerable and decided the political and developmental rewards of my inquiry outweighed them (Marshall 1995).

Re-reading my journals I was struck by the silence with which my colleagues and clients often met my interventions and the intense internal din of feelings and sense making that this triggered for me.

I had often the sensation throughout of being somehow 'disappeared' by the Steering Group women with whom I worked. At the ABC staff conference at the end of phase 1, and the evaluation conference at the end of phase 3, I played a high profile role. My contribution was acknowledged by appreciative remarks by politicians, and the content of my presentations was engaged with, yet it was as if I was kept at arms' length as a powerful outsider. Was this evidence of ownership, or of being disowned? Was this another instance of how gendered power relations were enacted in ABC, the keeping at arms' length of women's attempts to do gender differently, enacted by and through women themselves? Or was it evidence of my role as a breaker of silence, of being able to say as an outsider what cannot be said from the inside? In our inquiry discussion my client described the value of my role thus:

Me: *What feedback can you give me about my role as an external consultant?*
Aileen*: Through your being external: being able to tease things out, outside the politics of ABC; your being able to ask questions others haven't dared to ask; not being within the hierarchy.*

But was I not, as my supervisor suggested, also seen as dangerous, not moderated enough, or sufficiently appreciative of the daily dangers of their lives?

As I struggled to make sense of what was happening, and to assess the impact of my interventions, I was pulled between different purposes and realities. I had to construct a purpose and reality of my own, and keep this in balance with the needs of clients colleagues; to maintain my own sense of direction, and to work within the limitations of my limited consultancy contract. Accepting the limitations of my influence and intervention was painful but also led to growth.

Re-reading my own and my clients' project reports now, I am aware of the intensity of my subjective experience of being a consultant and partner in the project, but its power has subsided. I am impressed with the results we achieved, and these have moved into the foreground. I have the strange experience of wondering what all the angst I had recorded myself experiencing was about, much as if I have conducted a disappearing act of my own.

Part 6
Conclusions

On re-reading my account of the transnational project in the first part of this chapter, I see similar patterns between dynamics in my client /consultancy relationships and between transnational partners and the project leader. In both partners and clients expressed resentment at not being cared for by project leader or by myself. In both partners expressed desire for more direction that was not met. In both there was reluctance to engage with difference, expressed either as hostility or a lack of interest in other members who were not in some way 'the same'. In both there was a sense from time to time explicitly stated of not being valued by other members, and in particular by the one with the position power. These dynamics were also present in relationships between ABC Steering Group members and senior manager Jodie. In contrast, in relation to Anna, the politician, who positioned herself as equal and 'the same as other women' within Project

meetings, leaving her position power outside the door, these dynamics did not seem to apply.

During the Project I felt buffeted by desires to merge, to position myself with others and to take up a position apart. I began with an expectation of shared commitment to collaboration built on the basis of shared feminist values and practice with both my clients and transnational Project partners. I had met individual participants in the context of feminist or women's development networks and assumed that this, together with the subject and objectives of the project, signalled shared commitment. On reflection now, I see that I had grossly underestimated the work needed to build and sustain that collaboration in the business and political environments in which we were operating. When my expectations proved impossible to meet, I experienced betrayal and distress; I needed time to mourn the loss of an ideal closely held.

Inquiry as a method sustained me throughout the Project, enabling me to construct a position and a language from which to engage with my own inner world experience and with my clients and partners. From this position of inquiry, I invited partners to review their experience of working with each other and clients to review their experience of the client consultancy relationship with me. Subsequent discussions seemed to create a space within which we could, to a limited extent, articulate in words some of what had been expressed through silences within the consultancy relationship. At the final transnational meeting, I successfully facilitated discussion about how partners had worked together on the project. It seemed we were able to engage in discussion that had a more open quality, in contrast to the oppositional tone which had characterised many of our interactions during the project. During my consultancy to ABC, participants in the inquiry groups I co-facilitated did speak from their situated knowledge; in the process they broke taboos which were deeply embedded in the gender culture. I used inquiry to establish an independent stance of my own from which I was able to break through silences between the project leader and myself, and between members of the client organisation and me. I would argue that in a small way I did succeed in creating spaces in which women began to 'do gender' differently in relation to each other, moving out of victim position and exploring ways of speaking from positions of power.

However I would argue strongly that it would be a mistake to interpret this entirely in terms of intersubjective skills or in psychodynamic terms. All of the partners were operating in environments hostile to women's leadership, and in which gender equality initiatives were undervalued and under resourced. In my previous case studies, and in the first part of this

chapter, I have illustrated the undermining effects on women's self-esteem of environments that devalue our professional competence and the nature of the work we do. In discussions with contributors to my interviews, and in exploring my own experience in previous case studies, I explored how powerful desires for recognition withheld from women in these environments can be projected onto women in leadership.

In the Persephone project the funder had cut the budget for support activities, and partners attempts to get practical support were frustrated. Under pressure we ended up re-enacting many of the dynamics which we had set out to challenge. We were, after all, shaped not just by our feminist values but also by our individual needs to survive, in the environments in which we were living and working. Each carried our own wounds from battles fought in the gendered cultures and power regimes of the organisations who employed us, and each had to steer a path between looking to our separate interests and our desire to construct a shared agenda.

I will end my conclusions with a comment on the consultancy methodology that I developed. In the transnational and local projects, I set out to enable women who were differently positioned in organisations to overcome barriers to working on common goals related to gender equality. My approach invited women to speak from their different positions of identity and organisational role, in order to establish a partnership, or coalition, on the basis of a programme that they would construct together. This case study has illustrated the multi-levelled challenges of this approach, and has explored them first in relation to the transnational partnership, and secondly within my consultancy project.

In writing this final draft I found myself grappling with further questions. Was it right to break silence in the way that I have described? How would I now answer these questions, and what would be my measures of the quality and ethics of my intervention? I will take up these questions in the Red Thread that follows this chapter.

Red Thread 4

The Ethics of Breaking Silence

In my third case study inquiry became a means for women to break the silence about their experience of male power in ABC. This carried risks for them of increased vulnerability. What were the ethics of my use of power as external consultant to encourage this process? What were my responsibilities to attend to their safety?

Safety issues arose within the project on several levels:

Choice of sexual harassment as an issue to work with was driven by project participants. Although this was an area that exposed participants to danger, they chose it for strong reasons. My client contact had authority to act within this territory; the timing following the launch of a new policy was appropriate; it was an issue about which Steering Group members felt passionately. On this basis they developed a strategy and action plan for intervention.

More problematic for the ethics of feminist consultancy was the struggle between Aileen and myself about the scope and design of the ABC consultancy. My determination to reposition the project arose from individual political and professional interests; a wish to develop an intervention situated within organisation development, rather than equal opportunities for women. This led to a series of clashes between us, in which I tried to override her misgivings, in order to protect my vision of the project. This required her to work in collaboration with women with position power in the organisation, and for me to build sufficient trust between key players to make this working alliance possible.

The issues that arose were similar in pattern to those that arose in my first case study. In both situations my client felt my approach in some way threatened their safety. In both cases conflicts arose when I challenged limitations set by the organisational context in which they worked. In both situations I tried to hold in tension my client's safety needs, and the need to protect the overall project, and extend the territory of our intervention. In

both cases my consultancy work did enable women to break silence, and on this basis expose the negative positioning of women through apparently gender neutral management practices.

In writing my three case studies I have broken 'silence' between women with whom I worked on each project, as well as between client contacts and myself. In doing so I have explored the multiple frames through which I worked, associated with tensions between individual and organisational perspectives, and goals associated with personal, business, professional, and political concerns. In my case studies I described the vulnerability which I experienced in bringing aspects of my subjectivity into the public arena. In doing so I am breaking silences in feminist research about the more painful challenges of collaboration. I do so in the interest of sustaining my feminist consultancy and in order to use it to sustain feminist collaboration.

On re-reading this case study I noticed that I had drifted into using a developmental frame for describing changes I made in my relationship to the project leader. In my final draft I pulled back from this. At this moment I had a strong sense of myself as repeatedly drawn towards women who seem to offer my preferred form of nurturing: shared political values, collaboration and opportunities for self-development. This pattern has had generative and degenerative effects, acting as a powerful motivator which can sustain me through challenge, as in case study 2, but sometimes leading to expectations which are not based on a realistic assessment of constraints or different needs. My feminist political stance has legitimated these desires; but has sometimes slipped over into assumptions about how women are or should be. Recognition of this pattern, and development of the skills to work with it creatively, is part of the journey that is at the core of my inquiry.

This page is a space for silence, for reflection, for note taking....

Chapter 12

On Thresholds and Borderlands

Section 1
Introduction

Overview

The purpose of writing this chapter was to conceptualise in greater depth core themes that emerged from my case studies and from my wider inquiry. In writing this further cycle of inquiry I set out to consolidate my propositional knowing and to take up a more assured subject position as feminist, consultant and inquirer.

The chapter is in six sections:
Introduction contains chapter overview, method and introduction to key concepts;

Conceptualising feminist learning community explores the epistemological challenges to conceptualising collaboration within feminist communities of inquiry;

Relational Skills for Sustaining Feminist Collaboration conceptualises further the relational skills needed to build collaboration and inquiry between women within these communities and situates my inquiry within feminist organisation research;

Working across Thresholds conceptualises the thresholds held by feminist women who work across subject positions and explores the skills needed by feminist consultants working across these thresholds;

Feminist Consultancy in the Borderlands explores ontological issues raised for me as a

feminist consultant in the case studies, and picks up themes developed in chapter 7;

In *Conclusions* I return to the identity issues raised by the subject position I have taken up in this inquiry.

Method

This chapter was drafted in two stages. My initial intention was to consolidate the conceptual frame I had begun to elaborate in my second case study before drafting my final one. In practice I needed to allow this final case study to take its own shape. I set aside the first draft of this chapter and only returned to it after I had completed my final case study.

Writing this chapter then became a reflection on core elements of my consultancy practice, in relation to cross cutting themes that had also emerged in my inquiry into life process. In it, I pick up themes identified in earlier chapters and relate them to dilemmas within my professional practice. These themes were the subject of earlier cycles of inquiry and are detailed in my mapping of dynamics in workplace relationships between women (chapter 6), in my inquiry journey as a consultant and life process (chapters 3 and 4), and in my inquiry into yearning and un/belonging which (chapter 7). I situate this final cycle of my inquiry within the body of feminist research on gender relations and on women in organisations.

To begin this process of reflection, I identified clusters of key issues and concepts in my case studies and selected those that seemed central to my consultancy practice and which resonated with themes that had emerged from my inquiry journey. These concerned practices I had developed which engaged the tension between inner and outer world realities for myself and for women with whom I worked. I then drew from research that allowed me to explore the issues from multiple perspectives, drawing from psychodynamic, feminist and organisational research sources. I then mapped the issues and concepts I had previously used and embarked on further cycles of conceptualisation, drawing together and developing key concepts from these research sources. In the conceptual map that follows I introduce these key concepts.

Conceptual map

This sub-section introduces the key concepts developed in this chapter. Rather than surveying the literature in these different fields, I chose to engage in depth with selected texts that offered relational and / or feminist perspectives and which were concerned with the politics of the issues. From this position I refer to feminist organisation research and propose areas for more in depth critical engagement.

Feminist research has consistently called into question the boundaries between private and public lives. Writing aspects of my self, which I would not normally share in the consultancy world, into the text of my thesis, evoked intense feelings of vulnerability as well as exhilaration. The discovery of feminist research that offered conceptual frames for introducing these 'private' emotions into my inquiry acted as a powerful legitimising force and reduced my sense of personal vulnerability (hooks 1991, 1996; Marshall 1992; Stanley and Wise 1983; Stanley 1997). Through my reading of these and other texts, I have come to see the work I have done to conceptualise and process emotion in my consultancy relationships and practice and to enable collaboration between women in organisations as a form of relational practice. In this chapter, I develop my own use of this term as a tool for understanding and transforming power relationships (Fletcher 1998).

In each of my three case studies I described inquiry practices I had developed both to sustain my self as consultant, and as a method for doing consultancy with clients and colleagues. In my second case study I introduced the term 'relational practices' to refer to the skills I used to negotiate difficult issues with colleagues and clients. In the third case study I described how I used inquiry to establish a more equal relationship to the project leader, and to enable women in different positions of power to explore the basis for a shared agenda of organisational change. While I named all of these practices as 'relational', drawing from Fletcher, my use of the term was broad and is further conceptualised in this chapter, in the context of the inquiry based methods for which they were used (Fletcher 1998).

In black feminist inquiry, women inhabit both margins and mainstream in order to transform gendered and raced power relations, and to generate new knowledge (Bell 2000; hooks 1990). In my case studies I referred to the use of the term 'biculturalism' to name competence in moving between worlds (Bravette 1996; Davidson 1997). US post colonialist feminists developed the concept of travelling between worlds to describe their

experience of moving between mainstream and margins (Anzaldua 1987; Lugones 1997).

I have been inspired by this writing to use the concept of 'world travelling' to think through the challenges I experienced as I moved between working environments with different, and often opposing, knowledge paradigms. In the second case study, I explored my experience of these challenges in depth, seeking a form for legitimating knowledge generated by women in the 'worlds' we had created, and within the 'malestream'[1] worlds of their organisations. In my second case study, I introduced the concept of 'thresholds' to explore the use of position power by women to either accredit or withhold accreditation from colleagues with whom they had been working in collaborative spaces outside the formal structure of their organisation. In section 4 of this chapter I develop my use of the concepts of 'world travelling' and of 'thresholds' to conceptualise the skills needed by the feminist consultant who uses inquiry to generate new knowledge as she moves between the different worlds illustrated in figure 1 below. These are the worlds of client organisations and spaces for collaborative work between women, her own inner world and the public world of consultancy.

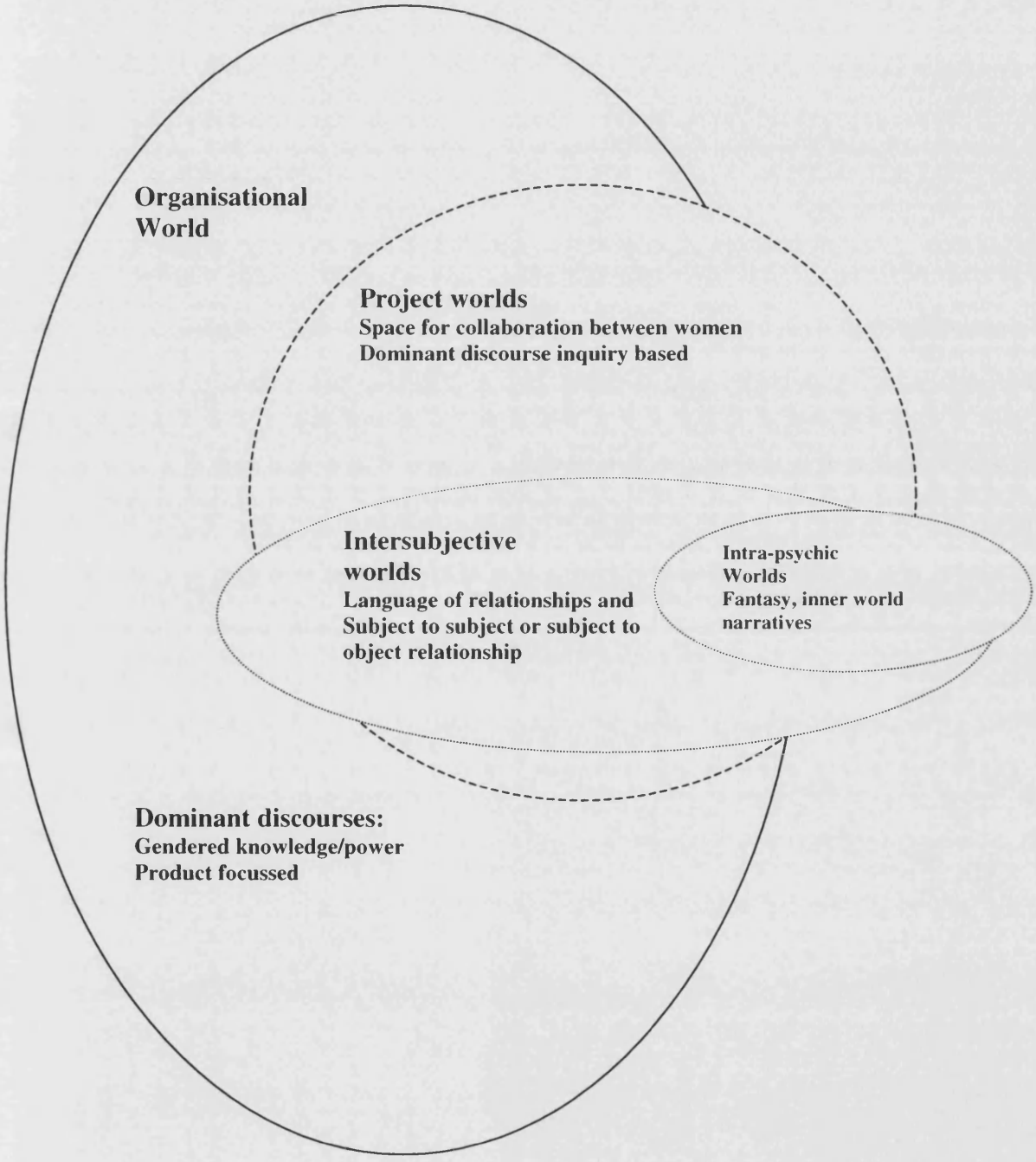
'Borderlands', is the term I used to describe the liminal spaces inhabited by feminists as they move between these different worlds. This inquiry has been a space in which I have brought together voices relating to my inner world and to the external world of organisations. In this space, voices of my inner world entered into dialogue and generated new knowledge about my self in relation to others as I practised my consultancy. In spaces I created through my consultancy, women who were differently positioned in organisations came together and generated new knowledge. Both sets of voices challenged gendered knowing and practice in organisations. In neither case was this process smooth or comfortable; in both difficult issues of power and identity had to be negotiated.

The concept of Borderlands, *La Frontera*, was first developed by Chicana US feminist, Anzaldua (1987; 1999) to describe the political struggles of mixed race people in the *Aztlan,* the US Southwest. The concept refers to the political and economic necessity for these inhabitants of leaving the familiar and safe home ground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain (Anzaldua 1999: 35). It refers both to a crossroads and a frontier.

1 A concept widely used by feminists to refer to discourses, practices and institutions which reproduce male power

Figure 1

The feminist consultant inhabiting and travelling between organisational, project and intersubjective worlds



In this chapter, I use the term to refer to the subjective and intersubjective spaces that I inhabit and create in order to enact my feminist politics. Their borders are not congruent with organisational boundaries, but cross them, referring to ontological states of being with their own languages and epistemologies, generative and degenerative qualities:

> This is my home
> this thin edge of
> barbwire
> Anzaldua 1999: 25

The notion of holding open a tension between two (or more) realities is at the core of my sense of self and, I maintain, at the core of the skills demanded of women with whom I work in each of my case studies. While the concept of 'world travelling' refers to the movement between different worlds, and 'borderlands' to an ontological state of being, the concept of 'intersubjectivity' approaches the experience of holding realities associated with different worlds in tension. Using a psychodynamic perspective, it refers to the psychology of holding a sense of the reality of both self and other, of difference and interconnectedness. This raises epistemological issues that are addressed in feminist debates concerning situated knowledge.

The concept of situated knowledge, as developed by feminist epistemologists, offered a starting point for conceptualising the consultancy methodology I described in two of my case studies (Haraway 1991; Harding 1991; Stanley and Wise 1993). In each of my case studies the knowledge about organisational life that women generated through their inquiry led to a gendered analysis of power and leadership within the organisations in which they were working. The issue in each case was how to validate this knowledge within the organisational environments in which they worked, and how to legitimate and accredit our work in producing this knowledge.

The concept of 'situated knowledge' offered me a starting point for conceptualising the skills needed for 'world travelling', and a firmer ground from which to engage with gendered assumptions embedded in these organisations. I used this concept explicitly in my third case study, where I invited colleagues and clients to enter into a dialogue from the positions they individually took up in their organisations, and looked at how their position power shaped their expectations of each other and approaches to collaboration.

In this chapter I use the notion of intersubjectivity as an organising concept for naming and exploring the inner and outer world dimensions of relationships between women which surfaced in my inquiry and which are illustrated in my case studies (Benjamin 1990; 1995). This concept enabled me to discover that the inner world issues with which I had been struggling could be thought about not merely as *intrapsychic*, belonging to my individual psyche, but as *intersubjective, or relational:*

> The intersubjective view, as distinguished from the intrapsychic, refers to what happens in the field of self and other, the crucial area we uncover with intrapsychic theory is the unconscious; the crucial element we explore with intersubjective theory is the representation of self and other as distinct but interrelated beings. Benjamin 1990:20

Benjamin's assertion that these worlds are not distinct, or in opposition, but complementary ways of understanding the psyche, offered me a way of conceptualising my movement back and forth between inner and outer world preoccupations. It also offered a way of conceptualising the difference between feelings and fantasies *about* others and the subjective quality of my *relatedness to* them (Benjamin 1990; Vince 1996: 222).

'Intersubjectivity' offers a way of understanding the world of passions and vulnerabilities between women, through a relational lens; a means of conceptualising them without either reducing explanation to individual histories, or representing them in ways which appear to undermine our professional competence. It also offers a useful way of naming the methodology I developed in my analysis of interview material: mapping resonance between the verbal content of interview discussions, and my experience of the intersubjective space between us.

In this chapter I weave together these key concepts to theorise difficulties women experienced in working together across differences of power, position, role and knowledge base. In each case study I referred to moments in which the sense of 'other' between women collapsed or became antagonistic, and described practices used to restore a positive sense of collaboration based on 'self and other'. I explored the impact of devaluing working environments and the challenges that these presented to sustaining coalition between women.

In the process of inquiry I identified more clearly what was at the core of my practice and came to see that this constellation of concepts - 'situated knowledge', 'world travelling', 'borderlands', 'relational practice' and 'intersubjectivity' referred to core elements of my approach. They offered a means of making sense of dilemmas that emerged in the consultancy interventions I describe and of accessing their multi-layered qualities.

In the rest of this chapter, I weave these concepts together to develop an epistemological and ontological framework for feminist inquiry and for my feminist consultancy practice.

Section 2

Conceptualising feminist learning community

Introduction

In this section I conceptualise the epistemological challenges of creating a generative experience of collaboration for women who come together across organisational boundaries. I start by using the concept of 'borderlands' to describe some of the qualities of collaborative spaces described in my case studies; then critically engage with the concept of epistemological community, using the extended epistemology of co-operative inquiry (Heron 1992, 1996; Reason 1988, 1994, 2000). Finally I return to the concept of 'world travelling' to explore some of the generative qualities of connection and exchange which took place between women.

Borderlands

Anzaldua uses the term 'borderlands' to describe an ontological state of being which is rooted in strategies of political resistance. Her struggle is to sustain multiplicity in an identity whose different elements are associated with warring national, ethnic, and sexual divisions. She grounds her epistemology in her analysis of this ontological state and offers it to all those who belong to conflicting cultures or communities and who wish to sustain multiple identities.

Anzaldua describes the experience of traversing different cultures as an embodied process, an inner war. This experience belongs to 'La Mestiza', a lesbian feminist woman of mixed race, belonging to none, partaking of each:

> Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures, and the value systems, la Mestiza undergoes a struggle of the flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture we get multiple, often opposing messages.
> Anzaldua 1999: 100

'Borderlands' seems an apt metaphor for the uncertain qualities of the spaces that I inhabit. Drawing from my experience of creating a secure base for myself I have sought to create and hold open these spaces for women in mainstream organisations; these have been shared spaces, which we jointly constructed and for which I as consultant have been responsible. In chapter 7 I used the concept of 'secure base' to describe some of the generative qualities of the spaces I aspired to create in my consultancy. 'Borderlands', with its connotations of instability and danger, offers a metaphor that conveys something of the changeable quality of my actual experience of these spaces and something of the epistemological challenges at stake.

In 'The Country of ELP' participants described qualities of the shared spaces that we created on the project that had inspired and sustained them in their professional and personal lives. However women refugee managers in my first case study described how sharing painful experiences had initially been empowering but finally become too much to bear. Similarly, partners and clients in the third case study were ambivalent about their experiences of coming together in shared spaces. In this case, difficulties in establishing trust and in building common ground, conflicts which could not be spoken and the 'disappearing' of voices which could not be openly confronted, meant that these spaces were frequently uncomfortable and anything but secure. In each of these case studies, as in my own inquiry into 'un/belonging', I was in touch with a quality of 'yearning' for connection and for mutual recognition that infused my experience of these spaces. This lent an edge of disappointment and sometimes of powerful frustration where it was not achieved; and, when it was, a quality of delight. While I do not claim that this yearning was shared by all, conversations with project participants and discussions in earlier cycles of this inquiry (chapter 6) confirmed that it was widely shared, in particular by participants

whose main work focus was gender equality.
Borderlands infused with longing for 'home' seems an apt metaphor for the uncertain quality of collaboration that was possible within these spaces. The challenge was to hold onto the 'yearning' for' home' as a generative force for constructing common ground, while holding in check its destructive power when expectations of finding a home were unmet. In the following section I explore what this meant for building feminist learning community.

Power and Trust in Collaborative Spaces

In each case study, women came together across organisational boundaries to generate new knowing and to sustain each other in challenging the gender order in their own organisations. This process was iterative and ongoing; based on the principles of action research (Reason 1988, 1994, Reason and Bradbury 2000) and of action learning (McGill and Beaty 1992; Vince 1996). Their aim was to identify and conceptualise barriers to women's equality and to create innovative practical interventions to tackle them. In this sense they were participants in communities of inquiry, setting out to reach a new understanding of gendered power within their spheres of operation and to develop methods of practical intervention to change the world. The process was time limited but open ended, without predetermined results. It depended on participants' willingness and ability to generate new knowledge through a process of joint exploration, sharing, and conceptualisation (Heron 1992, 1996; Reason 1988; 1994).

In my second case study, I referred to a co-authored paper in which I developed a conceptual framework for understanding the epistemological issues concerned with building 'learning community' with women working across organisational boundaries (Page and Scott 2001). The collaboration out of which this paper was written enabled me to make links between the epistemology and the politics of my consultancy practice. In the rest of this section I explore whether the concepts of 'epistemological' or 'learning' community could be used to convey the collaborative qualities of the spaces which I aimed to create.

In this paper my co-author and I speak of knowledge produced by women in relationships of trust (Code 1995). We make the point that this knowledge is responsible and accountable to the community that gave it birth; that it is shared and not composed of individually owned propositional statements. We then talk about the specific skills and conditions needed to sustain 'learning communities'. These relate to the provision of a

safe space in which differences can be articulated, dialogue can take place and relationships of trust develop (Page and Scott 2001). The paper conceptualised my experience of facilitating a network of independent women's organisations who had come together to learn how to introduce use of information and communication technologies into their day to day practice.

In each of my case studies crises of trust occurred which significantly reduced the scope of collaboration. While these crises took a different form in each case, each concerned a sense that the basis of solidarity between women had in some sense been violated or could not be sustained. Similarly, contributors to my interviews described crises of trust in relationships between women when individual members of peer groups achieved 'success' or external recognition.

How relevant is the notion of learning community, or community of inquiry, to conceptualising the complex processes involved in building trust across differences of power between women in organisational settings?

Participants in each project described in my case studies were women coming together from different organisations to which they were accountable as employees, and to which their change interventions were directed. In order to participate, individuals had to travel between the world of their own organisations and the new world of the shared project. In each case, this presented challenges arising from the different values and cultures embedded and enacted in these different 'worlds'. In each project, they found that in order to introduce learning and new practices developed within the project world into their organisations, they would need to challenge gendered regimes of power and work practices. They had to make their own assessment of how to use their new knowledge, and weigh up how to embed it in their practice in ways consistent with their career and survival.

This posed political and epistemological challenges. However, in each case study ontological issues were also at stake for some of the women concerned. New knowing led to a new sense of self for women refugee managers, and participants in ELP spoke of transformation that had occurred through the processes of sharing and knowledge generation that had taken place in the project. In the Persephone Project women in the client organisation did challenge the gendered regime of power in their organisation, and

in doing so transformed their sense of their own power and place in the organisation. In none of these instances was the process predictable or straightforward:

> The idea of learning communities ...requires us to step over borders that, in Anzaldua's words, define the spaces that are safe and unsafe...that distinguish *us* from *them (1987:3);* and to enter that vague and undetermined place – in a constant state of transition – that Anzaldua (1987 / 1999) has termed the 'borderlands'.
> Page and Scott 2001

The learning spaces I created were a base for women to go out from and in that sense 'secure', but by no means comfortable. They were subject to destructive as well as creative dynamics. New knowledge was generated in the context of relationships between participants who then developed it further in their own organisational worlds. The learning in this sense was embedded in relationships, and both sustained and enabled challenge in how gender power was enacted.

Acts of translation[i] for transfer of knowledge;

Lugones suggests that knowledge is generated, recognised and acted upon within what she has called 'worlds' (Lugones 1997). In each world inhabited - and this may be more than one world at the same time - inhabitants interpret what they see in particular, shared ways and have shared sets of practices. In asking participants in each project to leave the 'world' of their home organisation and to enter a new one, in which they would develop a new set of practices and a new type of perception, my colleagues and I were asking them to become what Lugones called 'world travellers' (Lugones 1997; Page and Scott 2001).

In our analysis of learning community my co-author and I suggested that knowledge was generated through shared activity, recognised and acted upon within 'epistemological communities' (Page and Scott 2001). Through subsequent reflection in this inquiry, I considered that 'community' implied homogeneity of approach that had not been my experience of the projects described in my case studies or compatible with the diversity of their participants. Participants each belonged to different organisations, sectors, and countries; they had different mother tongues and often spoke through interpreters. They each brought with them elements of the epistemologies and politics of the other worlds that they inhabited. These epistemologies were in the main positivist, product orientated,

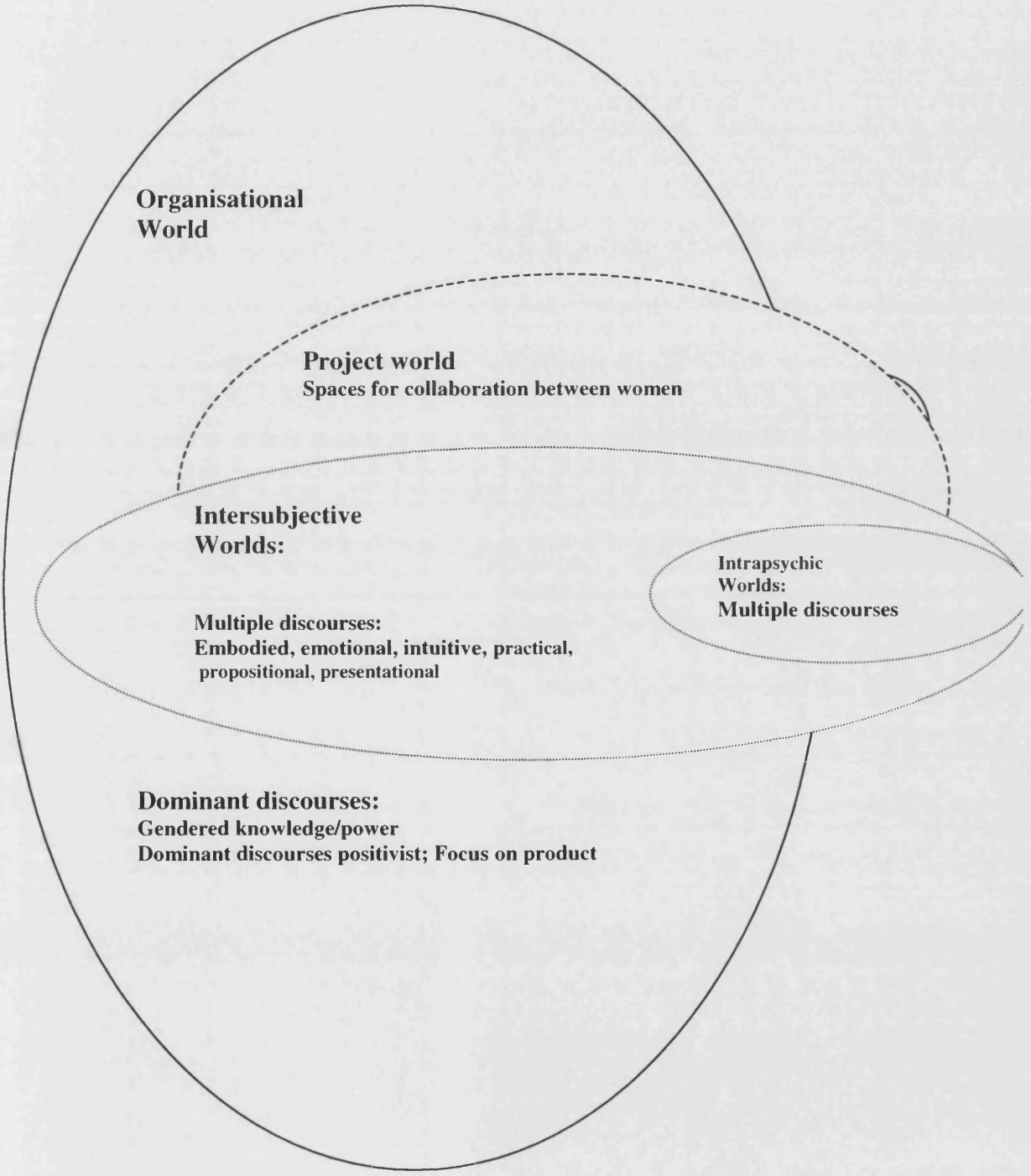
gender-neutral and not conducive to inquiry. They posed different political and epistemological challenges to the women's organisations that made up the network on which my first conceptualisation of learning community was based.
Nevertheless, the concept of 'epistemological community' did seem to offer a way of conceptualising some of the potential, and the challenges, of generating new knowledge from mutual exchange and interaction within these collaborative spaces. Using feminist notions of the term, I might now conceptualise 'learning community' as a new epistemological community in the making, struggling to create its own epistemic standards in relation to those embedded in the organisational environments and practices of its members (Nelson 1993).

Nelson's notion of epistemological community (1993) embraces different forms of knowledge, and asserts that there are many communities that develop and share knowledge and standards. Epistemological communities overlap with larger communities, and are dynamic and unstable; they evolve, disband, realign and cohere as interests and undertakings evolve and are abandoned, and as new experiences, standards and knowledge become possible (Nelson 1993: 148). They are not monolithic, nor homogeneous; but develop categories and standards, some of which each member accepts. Moreover we are each members of a number of such communities. Nelson asserts that it is these communities and not individuals that are the primary agents of knowledge (150). Thus, difficulties experienced by individuals in moving between project and organisational worlds could be conceptualised as conflicts associated with belonging to different epistemic regimes, in each of which propositional knowledge claims were embedded in specific practices which challenged or endorsed gendered power regimes.

While not 'communities of inquiry' in any explicit sense, the collaborative and learning spaces I facilitated did adopt elements of participative inquiry in their working methods (Reason 1994). In case study 2, I showed how joint reflection on practice offered a means for building shared standards for knowledge claims. In this case and, to a more limited extent in case study 3, participants valued and practised reflection on action in order to develop strategies for change. However in all three cases there were conflicts at points when project work had to be legitimated within the positivist product orientated cultures of the sponsoring organisations. That the 'new worlds' tended towards being inquiry based, and participants' 'home' worlds tended to be positivist and output orientated, overlaid the gendered dimensions of the challenges to existing orders of knowledge/power.

Figure 2

The feminist consultant generating new knowledge, crossing thresholds of organisational, project and intersubjective worlds



In figure 2 above I illustrate the epistemological challenges of moving between these worlds.

In chapter 2, I referred to the multiple forms of knowing asserted by feminist epistemologists and described the extended epistemology developed by practitioners of co-operative inquiry. Within this epistemology, valid propositional knowing is grounded in the experiential and practical knowledge of the subjects in the inquiry (Heron 1992, 1996; Reason 1988,1994,2000). Using this extended epistemology, I will now revisit the epistemological challenges in transferring and legitimating knowledge from the collaborative world of the project to the world of sponsoring organisations.

In each case study, new propositional knowledge was articulated in the process of drafting the final publication. In each case study, propositional knowledge first had to be extracted from the practice and relationships in which it was embedded. This was not a smooth process, as my case studies demonstrate, but fraught with difficult issues that had to be negotiated between women participants and myself. As my supervisor suggested and as my case studies illustrate, this involved acknowledging relationships and projections into their / our 'other world' audiences.

The term 'epistemological community' offers a means of articulating some of the difficulties in conceptualising the processes of transfer of learning. If knowledge is embedded in 'epistemological community', then 'transfer of learning' from one community to another is not neutral but subject to negotiation. It is likely to work only if members of both worlds share the same knowledge paradigm, or standards, and are ready and willing to set them aside in order to enter into dialogue.

My case studies showed that 'world travellers' who wished to transfer knowledge generated within one epistemological community into another required specific skills. At the very least these skills concerned 'translating' knowledge into a form adapted to make sense to members of each community, and to engage them in a dialogue within or across knowledge paradigms. However as I have shown, these 'acts of translation' were not gender neutral. Participants also needed to be able to challenge and confront gendered power regimes within their organisations; to seek ways of influencing the inhabitants of the worlds they frequented and of enacting gender differently; and to hone their own survival skills.

The extended epistemology developed for co-operative inquiry helped me to make sense of this process. In this extended epistemology, propositional knowledge is concerned with conceptual work, but is only one layer, or one stage, in a cycle of phases of knowing which need to be congruent with each other in order to make a knowledge claim (Heron 1992, 1996; Reason 1988, 1994). The propositional knowing generated by women in my case studies was embedded in their own practical, experiential, and presentational knowing. Similarly, 'the act of 'translation' in which they would need to engage in order to introduce this into their organisational environments would mean engaging with alternative regimes of practical, experiential and presentational knowing in which this propositional knowing was embedded. To address these challenges I have extended the notion of 'epistemological community' to signpost the associated challenges of 'transfer'.

World travelling as loving connection

Post colonialist feminist Lugones describes world travelling as a positive set of skills necessarily developed by those who are outsiders to the white 'Anglo' organisation of life in the US:

> The outsider has necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream construction of life where she is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life where she is more or less at 'home'. This flexibility is necessary for the outsider but can also be wilfully exercised by those who are at ease in the mainstream.
> Lugones 1992: 275

This concept of world travelling seems aptly to describe the experience and challenges for feminist women as they move between the 'mainstream' organisation of life in the organisations in which they work and the spaces that sustain them as feminists. Lugones refers to this travelling as:

> Skilful, creative, rich, enriching, and given certain circumstances, a loving way of being.
> Lugones 1992: 275

She contrasts this to the compulsory travelling in hostile Anglo worlds which women of colour practice out of necessity, and affirms that:

> We learn to love each other by learning to travel in each other's 'worlds'.
> Lugones 1992: 275

I use the term 'world travelling' metaphorically, to refer both to my experience as a feminist consultant and to the experience of women that I describe in my case studies. For participants in my second case study; visiting each other's countries literally for transnational meetings was an essential aspect of coming to understand the contexts in which each was operating, and this contributed to building the shared world of collaboration and learning. At the final evaluation event they affirmed the loving aspects of their collaborative relationships within this world. In contrast, women in the third case study seemed to experience transnational meetings as compulsory travel. Passion was often expressed as negative connection; there was disappointment at the lack of resources to travel and subsequent disinterest in each other's 'worlds' because they perceived the differences to be 'too great'. As a result new knowledge generated between partners was minimal.

Lugones distinguishes between world travelling which is loving and animated by playfulness and travelling with a spirit of arrogance. She describes playfulness as being a creative presence, open to surprise, to self-construction or reconstruction, and to being a fool. Arrogance in contrast is travelling in a spirit of conquest. The difference is not simply in the qualities or mood of the traveller, but in the ethos of the worlds themselves. There are some worlds in which we travel at our peril, that have arrogance and conquest in their ethos, that we enter out of necessity and in which it would be foolish to enter playfully. There are others within which we can be playful. This is illustrated in my third case study, where my relationship with clients was contaminated by the conflictual organisational ethos; or in the first case study, where my relationship was similarly undermined by organisational practice and history.

Women refugee managers in the first case study established loving connection across differences of language, culture, and ethnicity within their own group. Within this case study I could now conceptualise my authorship as an invitation to 'visit' with the worlds of my clients, to make an act of loving connection. The challenge would be to accept this on its own terms, not seeking to 'conquer' or to transgress my status as a vehicle for legitimation of this world within the world they had identified as mainstream. This would offer me a way of naming my research contribution as an act of love, and remove the pain

of not being acknowledged. From this perspective I feel more accepting of the contract offered.

Lugones asserts that it is only when we have travelled to each others worlds that we are fully subjects to each other (Lugones: 289). Being fully subject to each other takes place through exchange at a level of ontology; it is an exchange between women at a level of spirit, of emotion, of practical experience as well as of intellect. It is distinct from conquest, reducing the other to an object, or self image. In this sense it is similar to the concept of connected knowing, in which, in order to access new knowledge, women maintain a sense of themselves as separate alongside a process of identification (chapter 2; Red Thread 2). It may also draw from the multiple ways of knowing elaborated in the extended epistemology of co-operative inquiry (Heron 1992, 1996; Reason 1988, 1994).

In 'The Country of ELP', case study 2, participants developed the term 'cross fertilisation' to refer both to the process of exchange between them and to the ontological changes which occurred as a result. This did not conform to the product-orientated discourses predominant in their organisations, within which value had to be demonstrated. Thus ELP partners were moving between worlds which not only had different languages, but different systems of knowledge production. As a result, some knowledge claims were valued and recognised, others were simply ignored, silenced, or 'disappeared'. As ambassadors of the 'country of ELP' they were doubly challenged: to promote gender mainstreaming, in itself a demand to challenge the gendered, but apparently gender-neutral, policy process; but also to promote a way of working which was based on relational methodologies in a organisations which primarily valued product. In my third case study, I described how the regular 'disappearing' of knowledge offered by women was a powerful mechanism for retaining intact the gendered and raced power regimes of their organisation.

In this section I have shown that epistemological challenges to conceptualising collaboration within feminist community of inquiry are embedded in ontological and political challenges. In the next section I conceptualise the skills needed to work with these challenges in order to build feminist collaboration and inquiry.

Section 3
Relational skills for sustaining feminist collaboration and inquiry

Collaboration challenges: women doing gender

Women who wish to create a space for loving, playful exchange must employ specific skills in order to confront ontological and relational challenges, including those associated with recognising each other as subjects. In my case studies I identified 'flashpoints' on the thresholds of these spaces and of their associated organisational worlds, and explored how they were enacted in relationships between women.

In the previous section of this chapter I drew from feminist epistemology to conceptualise some of these challenges. In this section, I draw from feminist organisation theory to conceptualise how I met these challenges in my consultancy practice.

In chapter 8 I introduced research literature on women's experience of gender difference in organisations. This literature, developed during the 80's and 90's, is a comparatively recent arrival to the literature of management and organisation studies. Although it contains only passing references to relationships between women, it provides valuable contextual material for my inquiry. In the following paragraphs, I briefly summarise some of the strands within this research in order to situate my inquiry as a contribution to the feminist project of gendering organisation analysis and practice. As the literature is extensive, my references are intended to be selective rather than comprehensive and to illustrate key themes within the range of approaches relevant to my inquiry.

Over the past decade, the feminist project of 'gendering organisational analysis' has demonstrated both the resilience of male power in the workplace, and the complexity of mechanisms through which it is reproduced and maintained within the fabric of institutional and management practice (Acker 1990; Calas and Smircich 1996; Collinson and Hearn 1996; Izraeli and Adler 1994; Mills and Tancred 1992; Wajcman 1998). However, recent research acknowledges that applications of this research are under-developed and that there has been little research or theory on how to use this work to

change organisations (Meyerson and Kolb 2000).

In another strand of feminist organisation research, competing claims have been made as to whether or not there are gender differences in leadership style (Eagly and Johnson 1995). A significant strand within this research claims that women have specific qualities, which they express in their approaches to leadership (Ferrario 1991; Helgeson 1990; Oseen 1997; Rosener 1990). This literature is reviewed in chapter 8.

Another strand suggests that regardless of leadership style and attributes, women continue to be construed as 'different ' or in some way problematic (Marshall 1995; Sinclair 1998; Wajcman 1998). Furthermore, constructing leadership as feminine may confirm gender stereotypes and the traditional gender division of labour and create a misleading impression of women's orientation to leadership (Calas and Smircich 1993). However, it may be of some value as a basis for reconstructing leadership as a concept in contrast to traditional ideas about leadership and management and as a way of affirming the qualities associated with the 'feminine' in women and men (Billing and Alvesson 2000).

There is an extensive literature on the experience of individual women in leadership positions (Marshall 1984, 1995; Sinclair 1998; Wajcman 1998). However there is little research documenting how women have organised to collectively remove institutional barriers to women's equality. Some research has documented the effects of equal opportunities policies to remove specific institutional or cultural barriers to women (Maddock and Parkin 1995; Thobani 1995; Itzin 1995). Other studies have documented the resilience of male resistance to these initiatives and their limited effectiveness (Cockburn 1991; Coyle 1989; Webb 1997).

A recent research study identified four ways of formulating the problem of gender inequity in organisations related to four different feminist theoretical approaches, and linked these to organisational interventions and approaches (Meyerson and Kolb 2000: 560-3). The first two of these, 'liberal individualism' and 'liberal structuralism', aim to remove differences between men and women and to enable women to participate on an equal basis to men. Organisational Interventions associated with these two approaches aim to equip women with skills and remove discriminatory institutional barriers. These approaches were embedded in the equal opportunities policies and practices of the organisations I described in my second and third case studies. In contrast the third approach, valuing difference' or 'women's standpoint/advantage', aims to celebrate

gender differences rather than to eliminate them, and conceptualises gender difference as embedded in masculine and feminine identities. This was the approach adopted by the women refugee managers in my first case study. However in the fourth approach, 'resisting and re-visiting the dominant discourse', gender difference is not located in identity or in discriminatory practices. Rather, gender is an organising principle that shapes apparently gender neutral organisational practice. According to this approach, sex differences are an active, ongoing social construction, not inherent, or the result of early socialisation.

The latter more complex approach is the terrain within which I attempted to engage in the consultancy interventions described in my case studies. In order to position my inquiry as an action research based contribution to 'gendering organisation analysis', I will briefly discuss a research initiative to which I referred to in chapter 11.

This research project was undertaken collaboratively within a global manufacturing and retailing company and used inquiry as a method. It had a dual agenda of promoting gender equity and organisational objectives. Findings and commentaries were presented at an Academy of Management Symposium. Reading them, I was struck by similarities with my own inquiry in approach, findings and methodological dilemmas (Meyerson and Kolb 2000).

The research set out, as I did in my third case study, to engage organisation members up and down the hierarchy to question their own and others' deeply held assumptions about individual and organisational success. In doing so, it aimed to contest gender neutrality by exposing the often subtle ways in which policies, practices and interactions create gendered distinctions that may serve to justify male privilege (Ely and Meyerson 2000). The approach required participants to work collaboratively, to take a critical stance towards long held beliefs and assumptions, and to interrogate organisational practices through a process of collaborative inquiry. The aim was to enable co-researchers to analyse their experience and bring about change by and for themselves (Coleman and Rippin 2000).

The findings and methodological dilemmas cited in the study clarified for me the scale of the project I had taken on in my third case study and the nature of the organisational resistance I had encountered.

The research set out to enable partners to reflect on their experiences and meaning making processes, in order to understand how they might be contributing to gender inequities in the company. The researchers' primary agenda was gender, however they tended to play this down in order to gain the confidence of their partners, whose primary agenda was business. As in my case study, a space for discussing women's experiences in the organisation opened up and was used to share stories of invisible work that were not rewarded in the organisation. However participants in this research, as in my case studies, experienced difficulty in holding together their gender and business agendas. For example, when participants initiated a self-managed team they framed this as a solution to a business problem, rather than as an intervention by women to shift gendered power relations. As a result participant initiative resulted in a loss of the gender element of the dual agenda.

> The language of gender fell away unless we were there to hold it in place.
> Coleman and Rippin 2000: 588

In my third case study the dual agenda also 'fell away' when women participants took the initiative to assert their own priorities, and I was no longer present to hold it in place. The project was confirmed in its identity as a women's project when participants selected sexual harassment as a priority area for intervention, but at this point inquiry findings which made the link between gender equality and improvements to mainstream management practice were literally lost. In both cases collaborative approaches exposed the research to highjacking by organisational agendas. These agendas were shaped by the position power available to participants and their need to show results, but, as my case studies show, they were also embedded in organisational frameworks for gender equality initiatives (Acker 2000; Coleman and Rippin 2000). In both my case studies and the research, the dual agenda had been lost, and so had the spirit of inquiry:

> The initiatives taken became an advocation of what they wanted to do, rather than a way of letting people know what they and been discovering.
> Coleman and Rippin 2000: 586

The researchers concluded that collaboration both as a principle and as a strategy was central in bringing about generative organisational change. But creating and maintaining the relationship needed to be based not just on agreement but on mutuality and trust. This involved relational work, but this often has different meanings when men or women carry it out. The low status attached to collaborative working in a work environment where reward

and recognition is based on individualised achievement meant that senior managers did not commit the time to build collaborative relationships and delegated to more junior staff. This conflict between individualised achievement and collaborative working posed dilemmas that were experienced by women participants and partners in projects I described in each of my case studies.

The above research emphasises the complexity of the relationship between theory and practice, and the challenges of developing frameworks for change interventions that expose gendered power within 'gender neutral' organisational practices. It is unusual in that it explores the nature of the collaboration between researchers and practitioners and how it developed. Reading it sharpened my awareness of the specificity of what I had set out to achieve, and enabled me to see more clearly that the resistance I encountered may have been related to the framework I was advocating which challenged the limitations set by an equal opportunities frame. Inquiry and collaboration were the means of making this challenge, and in common with the researchers I learned that to be effective this needed to constantly balance challenge and disruption with maintaining and building trust (Coleman and Rippin 2000:587).

Relational practice for feminist collaboration

In this subsection I conceptualise further the challenges associated with sustaining this trust. I draw from research on relational work to conceptualise the skills and processes needed to sustain women's collaborative relationships.

Writing about the production of gendered power and meaning in organisations, Gherardi and others developed the notion of 'doing gender' to explore the interactions between women and men at symbolic and discursive levels (Gherardi 1995; West and Zimmerman 1991). Through my review of this literature I became more keenly aware of how women's leadership was represented in my client organisations, and sought ways of drawing participants' attention to how they were representing and enacting gender. In each case study, women confronted sexualised power relations within their organisation and embarked on a cycle of events that engaged them in gender power dynamics in a different way.

In writing this inquiry, I extended this research on how men and women did gender to consider how women 'did gender' in relation to each other in collaborative spaces

described in my case studies. At transnational meetings in both the second and third case studies, identity as well as organisational role and politics came into play. Sharing of personal information was important for building trust; however revealing 'hidden' differences, such as sexuality, was a source of potential vulnerability. Sharing was often based on assumed heterosexuality; lesbian identities, although known, were not always explicitly acknowledged or referred to within the work of the project. In some instances sharing lesbian identity became a way of establishing areas of common ground which could not otherwise be articulated within the project.

As the projects progressed, partners were able to develop more shared meaning where they 'visited' and actively engaged with the 'worlds' of project partners. Simply being in the countries of partners did not in itself enable partners to enter into creative exchange, as I have shown in my third case study. In the second case study facilitation enabled more 'personal' sharing to take place, and more exchange out of which shared meaning developed.

Women in my case studies experienced being devalued for their association with gender equality work, and ambivalent status in gendered power regimes. In these circumstances mutual affirmation and valuing of each other's gender equality work took on a special significance. In the second case study, participants stated that the process of exchange had helped each of them to see their achievements, in contrast to their experience in environments that did not affirm them. However this happened through facilitation, not spontaneously, and in other case studies not at all. Contributors[ii] to interviews identified the skill of reflecting back the value of work carried out by women who did not 'see 'their achievements and whose work was undervalued by others.

In my case studies I showed that women's collaborative relationships were doubly undermined, by the devaluing of women's equality work and by devaluing of women in their organisations. In each case study, building and sustaining relationships with each other was a core aspect of their work to challenge women's inequality. Similarly I showed that care and repair of my relationships with clients and colleagues was central in each of my case studies, and how I used inquiry to help me to do this work.

In each case study the 'project world' was a temporary staging post, constantly evolving, reflecting difference as well as communality. In generative moments its inhabitants were world travellers, agents of creativity, making new meaning through playful interaction with other inhabitants of this world and the worlds to which they would return. Through this

process, they developed a common language. However this creative mode was constantly threatened by the impact on participants, and their relationships with each other, of externally defined power differences. Sometimes it could not be sustained and degenerative merging, arrogance, or distancing prevailed. Sometimes the necessary repair work to return to creative mode could be done, sometimes not.

In my case studies I called this difficult work of care and repair a form of relational work. In case study three[iii] I used the term 'transversal politics' to discuss the politics of these practices, when used to sustain alliance in conflict zones.

In her research Fletcher uses the term relational practices to refer to practices motivated by a relational belief system, a belief in 'growth in connection' (Fletcher 1998). In relational theory, growth is conceptualised as occurring in a specific kind of interaction, and as requiring specific skills. They are characterised by mutual empathy and empowerment, an expectation that sites of relational interaction will be sites of growth for all parties involved (1998:167). Her research illustrates the devaluing and disappearing of 'relational' work in organisations, and within widely used definitions of work. She claims that this devaluing is an important mechanism for reproducing gendered power relationships in organisations and in organisational theory.

Relational theory provides an epistemology that assigns value to the qualities and attributes which women are socialised to develop, and on this basis challenges dominant organisational discourse. In Red Thread 1, I referred to dangers that this may be used to promote women into gender stereotyped leadership roles (Billing and Alvesson 2000; Calas and Smircich 1993). Here I use the concept for a specific purpose: to name and to assert the value of the inner work and intersubjective practices, which have been central to my inquiry. Through these practices I addressed ontological and political dilemmas which arose within my feminist consultancy practice.

In her research study of women engineers working in a high technology company, Fletcher identified four types of relational practice, each of which was systematically excluded from definitions of work in their working environment. The relational practices that I explored in my case studies related to all four categories that Fletcher identified. These were 'preserving', or activities associated with preserving the well being of the project; mutual empowering, or enabling others' contributions to the project; achieving, or using relational skills to enhance ones own professional development or growth; and

creating team, or working to create the background conditions in which group life can flourish. Fletcher developed sub categories, all which related closely to the consultancy practices I described in detail in my case studies. In her discussion, for example, she identified the following: repairing broken relationships ('achieving'); paying attention to the emotional overlay of situations to understand what was happening and what the most effective response would be ('reconnecting'); assessing others' emotional contexts and modifying ones' own behaviour in response ('reflecting'); and attending to the individual and attending to the collective ('creating team') (Fletcher 1998:168-173).

It is not my primary purpose to compare or develop additional categories of relational practice, but simply to assert similarity of struggle to assert the 'work' value of relational activities carried out within the projects and the undermining effects of this devaluing on collaborative relationships within the projects. At moments when participants were more identified with the 'worlds' of their organisation than the 'world' of the project, they found it hard to assert the value of their relational practices. Thus it was difficult for partners to assert the enriching quality of their experience of the project or the value of project methodologies within their organisations, unless they presented them in 'product' related terms.

Participants could not be relied upon to credit their project for their achievements in their organisational worlds, or to sustain awareness of the connections between these worlds. This became apparent in the second case study when difficult issues arose concerning accreditation of work done in the 'world' of the project. There was then a real risk of invisibilising the relational work and its facilitation in the project world, even thought this had sustained interventions in participating organisations.

In my second case study I developed the concept of 'thresholds' between these different worlds. As consultant responsible for the relational work within the projects, I was dependent on my clients to assert their power of dual citizenship by demanding that recognition and affirmation between women in the project world be represented publicly, in their organisational worlds. This often led to conflict between my clients and me, as asserting the value of relational methods developed within the project sometimes challenged adaptive strategies they had adopted in their organisations. I had to choose how far to accommodate these strategies, and how strongly to assert my need for accreditation. My choices, as were my clients, were based on a political reading of the contexts in which we were operating, as well as subjective and ontological considerations.

As I have shown in my case studies, these choices were not made easily or comfortably. Strong negative as well as positive emotions had to be held and processed in order to sustain collaboration.

I suggest this was a territory within my consultancy in which a special kind of relational work took place: women working across thresholds, transforming power relationships through feminist collaboration. I will now return to relational psychology to conceptualise in greater depth the issues that arise between women who cross these thresholds.

Recognition between women within intersubjective spaces

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced Benjamin's concept of intersubjectivity and stated that it offered a way of understanding the world of passions between women through relational lens. In this section I will use her concepts of intersubjectivity and of 'recognition' (Benjamin 1990; 1995) to conceptualise the relational skills I used to work with blocks to collaboration, exchange and learning between women.

Benjamin describes herself as a psychoanalyst involved from the beginning with feminist thought. She introduces her 'outline of intersubjectivity' with a statement that recently psychoanalytic schools have converged in an effort to formulate relational theories of the self (Eagle 1984; Mitchell 1988). This perspective:

> ...must confront the difficulty each subject has in recognising the other as an equivalent centre of experience.
> Benjamin 1990

Benjamin's formulation resonates with Lugones' concept of world travelling as loving connection, introduced earlier in this chapter. In the following quote Lugones describes the quality of this connection in terms very similar to Benjamin:

> Without knowing the other's 'world', one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other's presence because the other is only dimly present to one.
> Lugones 1992:289

When I came across these formulations they resonated powerfully on a number of levels.

In my life process inquiry, coming into voice as a subject on my own terms enabled me to enter into more dialogic interactions within professional and family relationships. In writing each of my case studies, I described moments where I experienced powerful feelings where a form of subject to subject affirmation was achieved or withheld. Benjamin's development of the term 'recognition' seemed to legitimate my desire, and to describe the moments where it was satisfied - or withheld:

> Recognition is so central to human existence as to often escape notice: or rather, it appears to us in so many guises that is seldom grasped as one overarching concept. There are any number of near- synonyms for it: to recognise is to affirm, validate, acknowledge, know, accept, understand, empathise, take in, tolerate, see, identify with, find familiar.... love
> Benjamin 1990: 15-16

In my case studies, recognition between women was not a straightforward or easy process. As Benjamin asserts, to give recognition the other must be recognised as a person in her own right:

> Recognition is that response from the other that makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self. It allows the self to realise its agency in a tangible way. But such recognition can only come from an other which we in turn recognise as a person in his or her own right.
> Benjamin 1990: 12

Benjamin's notion of 'intersubjectivity' specifically addresses the problem of addressing the other as subject. Following Winnicott (1969) Benjamin asserts the dual nature of psychic life. A mode of intersubjective reality, a relationship between two or more subjects sharing certain feelings or perceptions, coexists with a mode of fantasy that belongs to the individual subject and her intersubjective world.

The challenge is to hold the tension between the two realities: the intersubjective reality, a world in which we recognise, feel and symbolically represent subjectivity in relation to others; and the intrapsychic register in which the other becomes a part of our individual inner world, and to resist reducing them to an 'either/ or'. It is this holding of the two realities, and enabling clients and colleagues to do so, which is the task of and challenge to the consultant. For the feminist consultant this challenge takes specific form, because

of the gendered reality of power, which she seeks to mobilise and challenge.

In case studies 2 and 3 I illustrated how I held my intrapsychic and intersubjective realities in tension in order to re-work destructive patterns of relating with the project leaders. In each case this re-working meant being able to name and work with a destructive felt reality, triggered by a feeling that recognition had been withheld, and in each case this was possible only through positive self-recognition. In the first case study, in contrast, I was unable to keep hold of the tension between my internal reality, and the reality of my clients. The destructive consequences for myself were in my perception mirrored in the experiences of the women about which I had written in my research report.

Holding the intersubjective space open has been uncomfortable, at times painful, sometimes unsustainable. When I have succeeded it has been an important source of creativity. I have used the tension between my internal 'vision' of the project or task in hand and the reality described in discussion with participants to challenge the direction of the project. In case studies two and three, I described how I drew from my reflections on this tension to care for and repair relationships.

In writing up interviews and case studies I struggled to remain in touch with both the meaning and representation of my relationship to 'others' in my inner world, and the meanings we had jointly negotiated, and to represent both realities within my inquiry. In order to find and hold this position of inquiry, I held in mind, explored and recorded both dimensions of awareness and developed a methodology which allowed me to explore their inter–relationship. This approach was rooted in my conviction that ability to hold this tension or not was the key to destructive or creative outcomes.

During my consultancy, and during my inquiry, I moved in and out of writing narrative from my own 'vision' and experience, and engaging in joint sense making with others. As I have shown, engaging in joint sense making created challenges associated with vulnerability and power (chapters 19, 10 and 11). Jointly held realities were often fluid, constantly in movement, composed of the intersubjective and intrapsychic worlds of each participant; the shared reality we were weaving, and remnants of the organisational worlds to which participants also belonged and to which they would return. At times these realities merged, at times they clashed, often at moments when leadership was asserted.

In my second and third case studies I showed how differences came to the fore when we

had to negotiate a jointly held narrative to present to the external world outside the project. In the second case study I showed how I was able to provide a holding structure, and a conceptual framework, within which differences could be acknowledged and symbolised (chapter 10). Partners spoke from their different positions and realities, while consultants held open the intersubjective space within which a shared narrative was jointly negotiated. This achievement was not due to my competence alone; it relied on willingness of participants to respond to me in my consultancy role, within the consultancy relationship. This could by no means be relied upon, as I have shown in each of my case studies.

Drawing from Benjamin, I can now conceptualise as intersubjective fields the spaces within which consultants and clients, women in organisational roles, came together. In these spaces women's relationships were sustained on a number of different levels as women spoke alternately in their organisational roles, from their political positions, and from their individual needs and desires. The close association between the substance of our work on gender equality, and our individual desires for equality, lent a quality of passion to our approaches that suffused our interactions. At the same time, differences in our political approaches and strategies for organisational survival lent a messy and often explosive quality to our working relationships which I have described in my case studies. Each individual spoke both from her private inner world representations of the other, and the intersubjective shared world of relating with another person. The needs and desires which came into play may not all have been consciously held, but were expressed directly or indirectly in the intersubjective field.

Relational practices for intersubjective spaces

What then are the relational skills associated with doing consultancy within these intersubjective fields?

Feminist research claims that female leaders often reactivate the conflict between the desire to be nurtured and our drive to be independent; powerful women can be magnets for largely unconscious ambivalence about mothers and the feminine that both men and women feel (Sinclair 1998: 176). I have shown that relationships between women in organisational roles are riven by powerful emotions. In my inquiry these included desires for nurturing, protection, friendship, love, passionate engagement, recognition, legitimation and accreditation. In my case studies I explored how these dynamics were enacted between women at different levels of power in my consultancy projects. I also referred to

psychodynamic organisation research documenting women in Western cultures who experienced this dynamic (Graves Dumas 1985; Hirschorn 1993). In this research the desire to be nurtured, or to be nurturing, often sabotaged women's capacity to perform in their organisational role, and created a double bind or no-win situation.

Ways of working with these demands were also explored in earlier cycles of this inquiry (see for example interviews A, C, D, E, and F in chapter 6). One of the contributors (interview D) to my inquiry described the consultant's task as keeping balance between care for the individual client and care for the task related process. I could now add to this and say that in order to achieve this, the consultant must both be mindful of what she and her clients are likely to bring to the intersubjective field, and mobilise it appropriately for the task in hand.

Speaking of relationship between analysed and analyst, what we find, Benjamin writes, is a *momentary* balance between intrapsychic and intersubjective dimensions; a sustained tension or rapid movement between the patients' experience of us as inner material and as the recognising other. This should not be construed as an adaptation that reduces fantasy to reality; rather *it is a practice in the sustaining of a contradiction.* When the tension of sustaining contradiction breaks down, as it frequently does, mutuality, simultaneity and paradox are subordinated to complementary structures:

> The breakdown of tension between self and other in favour of relating as subject and object is a common fact of mental life. Breakdown is a common factor of intersubjective relatedness; what counts is the ability to restore or repair the relationship.
> Benjamin 1995: 46-7

In his description of creative and destructive group dynamics, Bion (1961) makes a similar point about how to work with group process. A creative group is defined not by the *absence* of destructive dynamics, but by *an ability to recognise and creatively mobilise* these destructive dynamics in order to achieve a group task. In both his account and Benjamin's, the ability to hold the tension between the two ways of relating is key. It is not the job of the consultant, or analyst, to prevent the breakdown of the tension – as breakdown is inevitable – but to develop in clients the ability to repair the relationship when it does. Repair, and breakdown, are not permanent states, but rather moments of creative or destructive connection, or disconnection.

Important relational skills for the feminist consultant, then, are those associated with creating environments in which the intersubjective field between women is recognised and named as a part of the lived reality of women in organisations, and with challenging attempts to pathologise their intersubjective experience. On the basis of my inquiry findings, I suggest that in using inquiry, consultants encourage women seeking feminist collaboration to draw from their intersubjective worlds in order to enrich their vision of equality within organisations.

The politics of recognition between women

> The paradox of recognition is not solved once and for all but remains an ongoing organising issue throughout life, becoming intense with each fresh struggle for independence, each confrontation with difference.
> Benjamin 1995: 94

In previous research, I described expectations for mutual support that came into play when women work on gender equality in organisations and pain when they were not met. I suggested that a perspective was needed that would address women's inner world and self sense, in addition to political and organisational factors (Page and Pestarini Lorandi 1992).

In my case studies powerful desires for recognition and accreditation came into play when women who had come together to work on women's equality looked to each other to provide what was seldom forthcoming from authority figures in their organisations. These desires were both potentially generative and destructive. Where they could be 'held' within relationships they became a creative force for collaboration; where they could not be acknowledged or worked through by individuals, they became destructive and undermined collaboration. One important key to maintaining generative interactions, was the capacity to distinguish between desire and expectations; a distinction which I worked through in my inquiry into yearning and un/belonging (chapter 7).

However in the conflicts I described in my case studies between women in positions of power and women in less powerful positions it was not possible to distinguish between desires - or yearning - and legitimate expectations. In my commentary on these dynamics I suggested that the term 'tempered radical', (Meyerson and Scully 1995), might be useful for understanding some of the conflicts experienced by women and by myself in my

consultancy (Red Threads 2 and 3). Women in the position of 'tempered radical' may make their own judgements about when and how to advocate for the collective interests with which they are identified or have been identified in the past. These judgements may take into account their social identity, ethnicity, sexuality or class, and how this interacts with their organisational position, and authority. However enacting tempered radicalism may undermine trust and limit scope for joint activity. This was illustrated in my third case study, where senior woman manager Jodi described a contingent view of the basis for coalition, in contrast to the unconditional approach desired from her by women looking to her for support.

Feminist epistemologists describe conflicts experienced by women carrying contradictory expectations and predisposition as arising from their occupying two contradictory subject positions in organisational discourse (Gherardi 1995; Harding 1987). In my case studies women identified 'women' and 'manager' as conflicting subject positions. In my interviews, contributor A described women expressing feelings of betrayal towards female colleagues who had achieved public recognition, even where this was directly beneficial to their group objectives. Women in each of my case studies described similar dynamics, in which women experienced conflict between subject positions associated with gender based group identity and organisation roles and tasks.

When senior women did not find a way of bridging the inherent conflict in subject positions, women associated with doing gender equality work seemed to experience a double devaluing. At these moments women who were perceived to hold the power to provide public recognition were positioned at a threshold between the 'shared' world of women fighting for equality, and the organisational world in which they had won some power and influence. In order to maintain their position in the organisation, they may have wanted to keep a distance from an equalities lobby. But if they did not support the lobby in the way that was expected, the lobby often experienced this as a betrayal. From the point of view of the women who felt betrayed, this experience was distressing, but relatively straight forward: one of their former members had benefited individually from their collective advocacy work to increase opportunities for women, and had 'pulled up the ladder'. Yet viewed from the perspective of senior women, a different set of issues emerged. These concerned her need to hold in tension her individual career interests, to work to her new responsibilities, peer group and accountabilities, and to own previous allegiances.

Using Benjamin's intersubjective theory, I return to the 'moments' of crisis illustrated in my case studies. At these moments, there was a breakdown in the tension between intersubjective and intrapsychic worlds, a moment when powerful destructive forces from the intrapsychic world threatened to take over, overlaid with negative stereotypes from the social and organisational cultures. Repair work was needed to restore balance, but this required political skills and resilience. Cultural stereotypes had to be resisted as well as internal pitfalls. Under these pressures, and without external support, collaboration between women sometimes broke down:

> When the tension between complementarity and mutuality break down, individually or culturally, the absence of a real other creates a kind of paranoid free for all. The cycle of destroying the reality of the other and filling the void with a fantasy of a feared and denigrated object, one who might be controlled for fear of retaliation, characterises all relations of domination.
> Benjamin 1995: 94

In my case studies, and at the beginning of this section, I illustrated these pitfalls and my use of first and second person inquiry to restore mutuality: In my third case study I showed how this required being politically astute, aware of complex gender stereotypes at play, as well as the yearning for support. In this case I showed it was necessary to recognise the meaning of acts of resistance to these stereotypes by the project leader as well the legitimacy of desires projected into her.

Separated and merged attachment

In their work on 'merged' and 'separated' attachment, Orbach and Eichenbaum explored similar dynamics to those described above between women in organisations and social networks (Orbach and Eichenbaum 1994). Drawing on relational psychology their research illustrates the pitfalls as well as the positive aspects of the relational psyche into which women are socialised, in a political environment that devalues them. Writing in the 80's, they located these dilemmas historically: contemporary women's friendships had been forged at a time when women's role was changing and women were demanding that they get out of the home and fulfil themselves. Their research drew from the experience of women clients at Women's Therapy Centres in New York and London. The authors assert that these women came from a wide range of backgrounds: differing political persuasions and sexual orientations. They were mainly white, with some black and Asian, between the

ages of 16 and 60, differing levels of formal education, family circumstances and incomes. Their findings illustrate how there had been a post-feminist self-imposed censorship on feelings which women had determined were unacceptable within the context of friendships with women, feelings of anger, betrayal, envy and competition. These negative feelings seemed to have been triggered by the very successes for which feminists fought. As women entered the professional world, where the ethos of competition was frequently at odds with the ethos of emotional connection, the bonds between women seemed to break; the old support systems to be undermined (Orbach and Eichenbaum 1994: 29). Women in positions of power became the isolated recipients of a bewildering range of projections and fantasies from other women, as well as from men:

> It is as if, in being a position of authority, she is no longer a woman
> 1994:31

In order to make sense of this situation, Orbach and Eichenbaum developed the work of Baker Miller (1984), who argued that since women's identity is formed within a nexus of relationships, concepts of individuation and separation are not useful in describing their psychological development. They explored the problems as well as the positive consequences that this poses for women, in order to understand some of the difficulties in woman to woman relationships:

> .....women's adult relationships are woven with the threads of merged attachments. Women are able to care for each other in the most exquisitely sensitive ways. Yet women unwittingly hold themselves and each other back; as fear of separation leads them to sabotage their own efforts and unknowingly restrain their friends.
> 1994: 54

Orbach and Eichenbaum provide abundant empirical illustrations of how these dynamics are enacted between women in the context of women's increasing presence and success in the public sphere. These are organised under the headings of abandonment, envy, competition, and anger. Within each one they introduce narratives of women struggling to break free of merged attachment, a paradigm of connectedness which no longer serves them, but which is nevertheless intricately interwoven with their identity. They assert women are drawing on their skills in maintaining relationships to repair these painful aspects of their relationships, to alleviate the pain and disappointments which they carry,

and to create relationships which give them love while allowing them to be separate (1994:55):

> When such disturbances occur in groups, then we face a challenge; the challenge of supporting one another...not to collapse under envy or guilt, but to meet the longings that had been, up to now, only fantasies. In accepting our longings, we can begin to be active in relation to them, bearing in mind that there will be conflicts and uncertainties to face in this new and foreign emotional territory. 1994:97

Orbach and Eichenbaum's account captured the range and quality of emotion of my experience in the case studies, as consultant and as conductor of this inquiry. This account helped me to make sense of the pain and joys in asserting a need for accreditation, and of the 'healing moment' of recognition which I described in case study 2 (chapter 10). In this case study I asked what the wound might be from which I felt was being healed. Orbach and Eichenbaum suggested a possible answer: In deciding to name me as author, the lead partner healed the wound caused by my fear that claiming accreditation would somehow wound her, or our collaboration:

> The unconscious equation that fulfilling oneself, succeeding in one's career, or achieving a personally satisfying love relationship, is a betrayal of another woman (mother) is extremely common.
> 194: 97

A similar range of emotion was described by contributors to my interviews: fear of damaging relationships by asserting individual needs; hostility enacted by women towards group members who asserted their independence.

Orbach and Eichenbaum's research focussed on friendships outside work settings, and did not address the complex political and organisational dynamics described by women in my case studies and interviews. However, precisely because its focus was one to one, it identified a strand that disappears in accounts concerned with political or organisational dynamics. My conceptual framework draws these strands together, providing a dynamic conceptual base that enables women working together across subject positions to disentangle and to negotiate conflicting sets of expectations, establishing coalition in environments of flux and change.

In their research study, Neumann and Noumair develop a systemic model for understanding women's experiences of envy in organisational life (Neumann and Noumair 1997). Their model makes the link between the internal experience of women in work settings and the external world of work. They explore how women's thought and feeling based responses of envy relate to objective threats to their career, position, or work based relationships. They find that, for reasons that relate to gender socialisation, women are unlikely to find it easy to see the links between their emotional response and the external threat to their position, leading to collusion with pathologising approaches to women's experiences of envy:

> The emotionally compelling quality of these incidents makes it difficult for those involved to see the strategic or systemic element of envy in the incident. ...but this stance keeps the individual woman captured by the emotions and not able to work them through. Women therefore collude with the idea that the envious emotions are inside them, and everyone else in the organisation thinks that the woman is behaving unreasonably or unprofessionally. In this way women get locked into carrying these strong emotions, believing that they are the problem and undermining their confidence, and thus their role performance.
> Neumann and Noumair 1997:18

To break the collusion, they argue, both systemic and intersubjective approaches are necessary. For women working together in organisational settings, the dynamics have to be approached and negotiated in relation to organisational agendas – as well as in relation to the issues that arise in relationships between women.

In my case studies I illustrated my use of first and second person inquiry (Torbert 2000) to engage with this interface between intersubjective and organisational issues, within consultancy and client relationships. As I have shown the work demanded a high degree of trust, and this was extremely difficult to sustain in competitive organisational environments. On the basis of my inquiry findings I have identified three important factors in sustaining this work: an appropriate conceptual framework; an appropriate working environment for women's collaboration; and an appropriate support system for the feminist consultant. An appropriate conceptual framework will address the intersubjective field between women, and challenge the tendency to pathologise strong emotion in women in organisational roles. An appropriate environment will enable women to explore the basis for building coalition, bringing the intersubjective into the equation. Appropriate support will enable the feminist consultant to work at the interface of her intrapsychic and

intersubjective worlds, working with strong emotion that is likely to be triggered to enhance her sense making. Without these, unrealistic expectations fuelled by powerful desires will continue to be an unresolved, and ongoing, destructive and explosive force between women working towards women's equality in organisations.

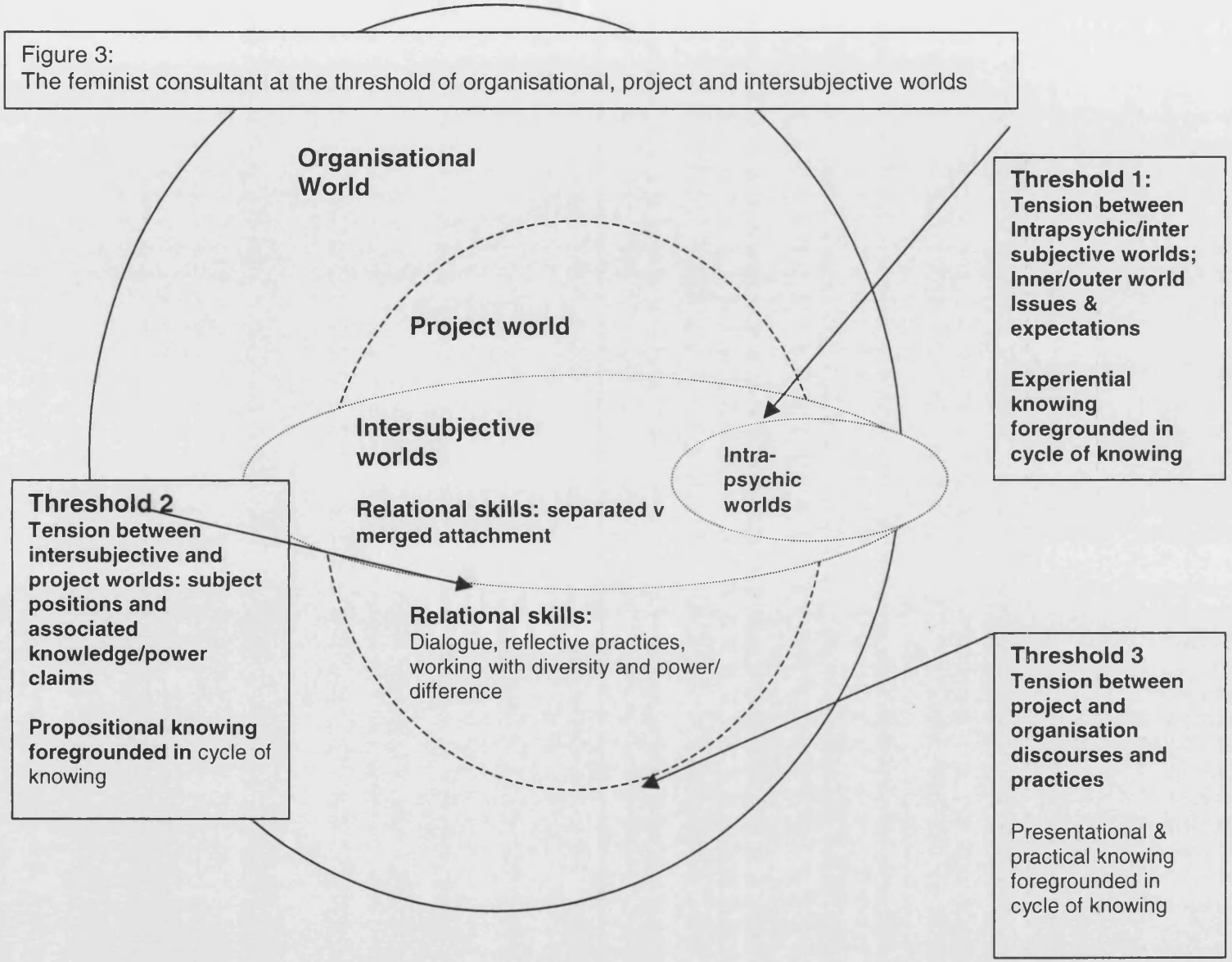
Section 4
Working across thresholds

Between project and organisational worlds

In this section I return to the thresholds held by feminist women who are working across subject positions. I explore the skills needed by feminist consultants working across these thresholds.

In figure 3 below I show three thresholds between intrapsychic, intersubjective, project and organisational worlds. Boundaries between them are permeable; individuals inhabit them simultaneously. Travelling between worlds involves an ability to operate skilfully with different systems of representation and meaning, and to 'translate' knowledge across thresholds, into different languages and cultures. These skills are political, in the sense that they require making strategic assessments of how to operate within, and challenge, gendered power regimes. They are relational in the sense that they involve an ability to manage subject to subject relationships, in the context of political and organisational tasks and goals. I indicate in figure 3 the epistemological tensions associated with threshold work between worlds, and the associated relational skills, drawing from an adapted version of the extended epistemology developed for co-operative inquiry (chapter 2). In each world experiential, practical, propositional and representational knowing are used. On the basis of analysis in my case studies, on each threshold one of these ways of knowing is foregrounded as the primary means for sustaining relationship across these thresholds.

Figure 3:
The feminist consultant at the threshold of organisational, project and intersubjective worlds



Threshold 1 concerns managing the interface between intrapsychic and intersubjective worlds. These are the tensions I explored above, using Benjamin's and Lugones' notions of subject to subject and subject to object interactions to explore breakdowns in dialogue and collaboration. To sustain subject to subject interactions with women clients and colleagues I foreground embodied, emotional and experiential knowing.

Threshold 2 refers to maintaining relationships from different subject positions which may be perceived to be in conflict, and to holding the tension between the epistemological communities of organisational and project worlds. In my case studies I showed how these conflicting claims were enacted through claims based on propositional knowing embedded in specific communities of practice.

At threshold 3 these conflicts are played out through the politics of representational knowing: how to 'translate' knowledge produced in and embedded in relationships within one epistemic community in a form that will be understood, and can effectively challenge power relationships in another.

The feminist consultant requires specific skills to work across these thresholds. She must not only create 'project world' environments in which women can develop knowledge and work practices which support their political collaboration; but also equip her clients to assert the value of the working practices in which they are engaged, in relation to their sponsoring organisations' objectives. As I have shown in section 2 above, this transfer of knowledge across a threshold between worlds is complex and involves political and epistemological challenges.

As my case studies demonstrate, the feminist consultant may find her work is 'disappeared' by women with whom she is working. In some work environments relational methods may be characterised by women and men alike as to do with friendship: nice, but not real work (Fletcher 1998). She must be prepared to recognise this as a manifestation of dominant systems of power/knowledge, and their reproduction. In order to build credibility she must demonstrate bicultural skills: ability to perform and to enable her clients to perform, within the dominant discourses of their organisations, without losing the ethos of the project values and approach.

In my second case study, I described the struggle to find a way of representing the project 'methodology' which translated between the worlds of the project and of the organisations

to which participants belonged. Project participants were positioned at thresholds between the relational work ethos of the project, and the product orientated competency models in which they had to perform as members of their organisations.

In each of my case studies there were 'flashpoints' where sets of values associated with different worlds came into conflict; these flashpoints occurred on the thresholds indicated on figure 3. In each case study, strong emotions associated with these flashpoints had to be 'held' within the consultancy relationship or in relationships with co-consultants. They were tackled as crises on two levels. On a practical level, a form had to be found for representing our work as valuable within the dominant discourses of sponsoring organisations. On a 'relational' level the crises were lived out within my consultancy relationships as crises of legitimation and self-valuing.

Between intersubjective and project worlds

Orbach and Eichenbaum recognised that 'moving from merged to separated attachments is an enormous task' and acknowledged that difficulties in relationships between women continue to cause distress. Benjamin points to resolution in struggles for mutual recognition between women through distinguishing fantasy from what can be achieved in the real world, and through accepting loss of the illusion that the fantasy represented. To illustrate this she summarises Lazarre (1991):

> She realises [instead] that her obstacle is the dream of perfect symmetry, her own wish to be perfectly recognised, completely responded to – her fantasy of perfect self-expression in a perfect world. Her challenge was to continue writing, loving, seeking recognition in the absence of the prefect mother-redeemer who would constitute that world...she has to find a way to contain, through writing, the loss of an illusion...
> Benjamin 1995: 112

The point was, not to give up the desire for recognition but, in owning the longing, to mourn the loss. Mourning opened up a space for acts of reparation, that accepting imperfection can lead to restoration of expressive space of resonance with that other:

> Within the space between survival and loss, acknowledging our own propensity for adoration and dread, fantasy can become the medium for the self at play. That

> space of creative interchange offers consolation for the inevitable experience of leaving and losing the other, of not being, or having, everything.
> Benjamin 1995:113

The role of the feminist consultant, then, might be to attempt to hold open these spaces in which fantasy and reality can both be owned, the loss of the fantasy of perfect recognition mourned, and the tension between fantasy and reality held open as a source of creativity. Of course she cannot do so single handed but must seek to encourage a culture within the spaces she creates, in which women in organisations are able to own and experience these distinctions, and to enable them to become sources of creativity. To achieve this she must step outside existing pathologising cultures, and be explicit about her epistemological and ontological base. From this base, she must be prepared to challenge dominant discourses of knowledge and gendered power, and enable her clients to disentangle the conflicts arising from their dual subject positions as members of different 'worlds' and their associated epistemological communities.

Between inner and organisational worlds

The model developed by Neumann and Noumair (1997) offers a systemic approach to understanding the links between the intrapsychic world of women and tangible change in organisational and social environments. Their ability to illumine these links and to enable women to see emotion as a valid response to a tangible external reality, will be essential for the feminist consultant. This will require her to engage with the gendered meanings assigned by actors who are differently positioned in the organisation. In the next section I will turn to concepts which enable her to identify some of the ontological, epistemological and ethical issues which this may raise.

To conclude this section, I have explored in some detail two approaches to understanding the dynamics of separation and recognition in women to women dynamics from different psychoanalytic perspectives. Both accounts resonate with the issues to which I had previously referred in my case studies and interviews. Although neither address directly how these dynamics might relate to organisational issues, I am suggesting that both offer conceptual tools for understanding and working with the emotional underpinnings of work based relationships between women. In particular, the dynamic and fluid quality of the intersubjective field in which fantasy and 'real' objects are held in tension offers a way out of binary approaches. It acknowledges that we are likely to continue to move between

intrapsychic, intersubjective, project and organisational worlds. These worlds are not mutually exclusive, but may be inhabited simultaneously.

Section 5
Feminist Consultancy in the Borderlands

In this section, I return to the metaphor of 'Borderlands' introduced in my discussion of feminist learning community at the beginning of this chapter, to explore the quality of my experience as a feminist consultant and the ontological and political challenges at stake. The section picks up themes developed in my earlier writing 'On Un/Belonging' (chapter 7).

Anzaldua's 'borderlands' are inhabited by refugees who leave the familiar and safe homeland to make a living in unknown and possibly dangerous terrain. Stanley (1997) developed this concept of borderlands to explore the transitory and 'passing' status of women in relation to the academy. Like Anzaldua she used the concept as a metaphor for an ontological state and an epistemology; a literal *frontera*, but also a state of mind. In her analysis and commentary on Anzaldua, the borderlands create people whose everyday ontological condition is one of constant liminality, of constant 'crossing over', between two states of being. At the same time, her concept of borderlands signified that there is a state of 'being in between', and a 'territory between', a kind of space which is social as well as physical or geographical. People of different races, ethnicities, cultures, languages, classes, religions, sexualities, genders and politics (Stanley 1997: 1-2) inhabit this space.

The idea of borderlands 'as a liminal state', resonates with my experience as a consultant moving between worlds and across thresholds. A borderland is a contested zone; relationships between women which I have described in this inquiry were zones of contested claims to recognise, legitimate and accredit their work in organisations. Stanley' s borderlands are also epistemological frontiers, sites of interface between different knowledge claims in which difference is spoken through the conjunction knowledge/power. She asks:

> Who are those who 'get heard' and whose experience passes for knowledge?' (Stanley 1997: 2)

As I have shown, women were silenced in gendered power regimes, but kept silent as a strategy of resistance. Women mobilised each other to 'break silence', but could not be relied upon to credit each other for speaking out. Women desired but did not always receive recognition from each as makers of new knowledge, or challengers of knowledge / power regimes.

In the organisations which are described in my inquiry, women's positioning within the dominant culture necessitated careful self-monitoring. Accreditation was played out between women, where some held the power to accredit the work of others within dominant cultures and others were dependent on accreditation. Issues of identity also came into play, as project partners shared or chose not to share their positioning within family relationships, their heterosexual or lesbian identity, and current life issues.

In the short time available within limited time and budget, the ability to work effectively depended on finding ways of building relationships that were inclusive, without losing or avoiding differences of power. Participants emphasised the importance of their experience of being cared for and the sense of being valued; in this sense the desire to be cared for was part of the currency of communication and relationship building between partners and consultants. The project relationships that were built enabled or disabled partners to create a shared consciousness, which was informed by and cross-fertilised the context-specific interventions which they each initiated within their organisations. The development of this consciousness was neither comfortable, nor an even or stable process, as partners struggled to understand the different organisational as well as national cultures in which they were each working. In Anzaldua's words:

> The coming together of two self consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference creates un choque, a cultural collision.
> Anzaldua 1999: 100

Situating her writing in a historical and political context of discrimination and oppression, Anzaldua speaks as a lesbian, Mestiza Chicana, affirming Indian, Spanish, Mexican and US identities. She describes this as a state of multiple personality, a clash of voices and internal strife, a psychic restlessness. Out of this she creates the concept of Mestiza consciousness, (Forbes 1973: Wolf 1959) a consciousness of the borderlands, which is pluralistic, tolerant of ambiguity, and able to sustain contradictions:

As a feminist consultant and inquirer this state of tolerance of ambiguity and contradiction, the pain as well as strength that can result from being at a crossroads of cultures, resonates for me as an ontological state. In my professional practice I am mindful of my positioning in relation to clients and colleagues. I seek to mediate the cultural collisions experienced by women with whom I work and enable them to negotiate the multiple messages associated with them. I move between worlds of which my clients are a part. I transform myself into a person who is on the outside, yet able to take up a position within. I am mindful of how I represent my identity, of how it might be perceived as a block or an aid to alliance making. I try to hold to my values as I traverse these territories. This is more than a moving between cultures; it necessitates the development of a new consciousness, and a new epistemology. Anzaldua describes this as an embodied process, necessitating moving through emotional conflict in order to resist stasis, and identification with one, partial view of 'reality'.

> ...and though it is a source of intense pain, an energy comes from continuous creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. By creating a new mythos, that is a change in the way we perceive reality, ourselves, and the ways we behave, la Mestiza creates a new consciousness.
> Anzaldua 1987: 102

The challenge she throws down to feminists, to all who find themselves to be ontological 'outsiders', unidentified with or excluded from dominant cultures, is one of moving out of opposition towards a new consciousness able to straddle cultures and take elements from each. She writes in the context of life and death struggles for survival of the Chicano peoples in the US and Mexico. I write as a feminist 'passing' in hetero-patriarchal organisation cultures, in order to make a livelihood, and seeking to open spaces in which other women can sustain themselves as agents of change:

> The struggle has always been inner and is played out in the outer terrains.....Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.
> Anzaldua 1999: 109

Anzaldua and Stanley write from an explicitly feminist stance, powerfully illustrating how epistemology is grounded in ontology. The metaphor of 'borderlands' resonates powerfully

with the state of being I experienced as a feminist consultant in organisational and 'women's' worlds that did not welcome me in this identity; where heterosexuality was often assumed, and bonding on the basis of similarity can and did sometimes exclude specificity:

> An interface in which some voices sound, resound, more than others, and in which echo connotes power.
> Stanley 1997: 1

Stanley asserts that feminists are ontologically outsiders, 'other' to the academy: like George Simmel's 'stranger', they travel between, and in this way bring the ontological borderland with them, wear it almost like a visible marker which sets them apart in their difference (Stanley 1997:6). This metaphor of the stranger is particularly apt for the feminist consultant, doubly outsider through her politics, her sexuality, and her consultancy role and practices.

Section 6
Conclusions

In setting out to write this chapter I aimed to unpack some of the methodological dilemmas arising from the tensions I experienced in writing the case studies. I was preoccupied with finding the right balance in my writing inquiry between inner and outer world voices; between exploring issues relating to my own identity and positioning as a feminist consultant, and with conceptualising the dynamics between women in organisations. I set out to articulate more clearly the methods I had developed to enable women to collaborate in order to make a difference in their organisational worlds; and to show myself as a reflective practitioner in the gendered and hetero-sexualised organisational environments in which I worked. I wanted to maintain a creative tension between my feminist ontology, and the 'masks' I wore as an organisation consultant. I was aware that I needed a conceptual framework which would allow me to engage with political and ethical issues of re-presentation and positioning, in relation to dominant gendered discourses of power / knowledge.

In writing the chapter I took the concept of 'borderlands' to develop the metaphor of the

feminist consultant and her clients as 'world travellers', moving between a variety of different epistemological and intersubjective worlds. In my Red Threads, I began to collect alternatives to the images constructed through the 'feminine in management' literature to describe the qualities and approaches of the feminist consultant. From the position at which I have arrived through this inquiry I offer the following to add these images:

> The feminist consultant, more than a traveller, is a political actor who uses inquiry to challenge gendered power / knowledge regimes, to envision and bring into being new epistemological and intersubjective worlds. To do so she needs to develop a repertoire of relational and political skills. She tries to hold open intersubjective spaces between women, naming the tension between inner and outer worlds, fantasy and reality, concerning women's expectations and desires of each other. She holds the tension between yearning to find refuge in each other and her political assessment of what common ground it is possible to build. To do so she will explore the links between women's inner world response to organisational outer world realities; and draw upon feminist theory to legitimate and validate women's contributions to organisations. She will need to be aware of the dangerous and seductive appeal of merged attachment between women - and of how this might be played out in her consultancy relationships with women who are her clients. She will draw on all these skills to remain grounded in her own ontology, and from this position, seek to create and sustain her own 'secure enough' base. From this base she will make political assessments of how to position and present herself, in order to assert the value of her work. In Stanley's words, she works at:
>
> 'An interface between different knowledges, different knowledge claims, in which difference is spoken through the conjunction knowledge/power'.
> Stanley 1997:2

In the process of writing this chapter, of engaging with feminist epistemology and psychoanalytic writing, I have discovered communities of inquiry to which I feel affiliated. In the process, I have developed a clearer sense of the standpoints from which I have been conducting my inquiry and of how these informed the consultancy relationships I developed. I have been aware of pressures and desires to speak for different audiences and acknowledged earlier in my inquiry how at times this was a burden, at times an inspiration (chapter 2). I am making knowledge claims that draw from a variety of epistemological, political and practice based communities. As a feminist action inquirer,

my criteria for quality must lie in my method rather than in shared ontological and political or epistemological stance.

In writing this inquiry I have taken up subject positions which may conflict with the positions I had taken up in my consultancy relationships. These have been matters for political decision, and concern my livelihood. They are a timely reminder of the dangers of the *frontera,* the borderlands, which I inhabit as a feminist who is dependent for a livelihood on strategic positioning:

> And what should not be forgotten is the intensely emotional character of much of the reaction and resistance to dissenting feminist ideas, including reactions by incorporated feminisms to those other Others, the feminists who are not like 'us', who are too extreme, or too different...*we* are not like *that*!
> Stanley 1997: 8

These divisions, and the intensely emotional character of resistance to feminist ideas, characterise the borderlands that I inhabit as a feminist consultant, working with women who are differently positioned in organisations and who take up different standpoints. These women 'do gender' differently, according to their strategies for survival, for self-progression, for self-promotion. It is in relation to these passions, these resistances, that I arm myself, in order to pass, in order to work, in order to build sites of individual and collective resistance and change.

---

i The theme of what is lost in translation between languages and cultures was explored by Eva Hoffman in describing her experiences of dislocation as a polish Jewish emigrant to the US (Hoffman 1990).

ii Interviewees C and E.

ii Border Crossing Skills for Coalition and Consultancy

Chapter 13

Final Reflections

The making of a feminist consultant

I set out to explore a field of inquiry, 'what happens between women in organisations'. In naming my inquiry, I named my own passion - to understand more clearly what happens between women who come together to work towards greater gender equality, and to develop a language to speak about the challenges with which we confront each other.

In the course of doing my inquiry, I situated my inquiry in its specific political and sectoral context. I explored the personal meaning it held for me in the context of my life process, and how this has informed my professional practice. In discussions with women in my inquiry, within women's networks, professional associations and with colleagues and friends, I confirmed that while the issues I have explored are located within a shared territory, strategies for working with them differ, as do the meanings made of them.

I have sought to explore this territory through the lens of my consultancy interventions: the issues which emerged between the women with whom I was in client and consultant roles, how I worked with these issues as consultant, and how I conceptualised the issues within my inquiry. Through autobiographical writing I explored the personal meaning expressed in my political vision, and how this was at different times a source of energy and purpose or of frustration and disappointment. I created practices to engage with life issues that emerged during my inquiry, and to trace the ways they were threaded through my professional and personal life. In this process I have taken up new and more dialogic subject positions in relation to others.

Through introducing inquiry into my consultancy work, I made my practice more reflexive and became bolder at engaging colleagues and clients with parts of my self which I would formerly have kept hidden.

One of my goals in conducting this inquiry was to make a transition, to create a new narrative about myself, refocusing through recollection, in order to regenerate a sense of meaning and of purpose in my life. While doing inquiry has not furnished me with new purpose, it has given me a more solid sense of how I work and grounding in a clearer sense of what drives me. It has also provided a framework within which the personal and professional dimensions of my life have cross-fertilised in surprising ways.

Each of the chapters in my thesis encapsulated a different moment in my developing understanding of my consultancy process. In returning to them, I was excited by the threads of continuity in the issues that have emerged, without conscious planning or selection, in the process of writing. My inquiry practices have allowed them to surface in my awareness, provided a space to explore and to name them, and to become more skilful in negotiating them in practice as a feminist consultant.

Looking back, I can trace this journey. At the time, I wrote each chapter separately, working from intuition, driven by the issues that were in the foreground for me at the time. The act of writing an account of how I had used inquiry in my work with clients seemed sufficient. In the writing, this proved to be a starting point only; the story with which I began moved quickly into the background, other less palatable ones came forward. In this process I found my inquiry; writing with multiple voices, holding different realities in tension, and in the process moving towards a more grounded sense of myself as a feminist consultant. I would not wish to claim I have arrived at a comfortable resolution or an end point, but rather a kaleidoscope of explorations, through which I have come to a better knowledge of the territory, and an ability to negotiate it more skilfully as a consultant.

As a first step[i] in my inquiry, I went out to establish whether my interests were in any way recognisable to other women consultants. While not all of them were feminist or directly working on women's equality issues, each were in some way supportive of my inquiry and willing to engage in a dialogue to explore their experience of working with women. These six interviews served to map the territory, and develop a method. In each case I experienced a mirroring between aspects of interactions we were exploring in our

discussions and the dynamics we were enacting between us. I decided to develop inquiry practices that would allow me to continue to explore these parallels.

Returning now to the qualifying statement I made about my field of inquiry, I assert that these issues between women were lived out in organisational contexts which not only devalued them as women in leadership roles, but which also marginalised their equalities initiatives. In each of my case studies, women described organisational cultures that consistently positioned their work outside organisational or business priorities. Their work on women's equality was always precarious, under resourced and outside these priorities. This put them in a complex double bind. They needed to produce results to establish credibility for themselves and for their work, but had limited power to achieve any. They valued the relationships established with each other as part of the project work, but did not always credit these in their organisations or when referring to their own achievements.

In considering each case study now, it seems clear to me that women tended to look to other women in leadership roles to compensate for the degenerative elements of the environments in which they worked. Their experience seemed to cross ethnic cultures and organisational environments. Consciously expressed expectations were underpinned by powerful projections, which I too experienced in relation to colleagues and to clients. In the third case study I explored how as part to my inquiry I engaged with these dynamics from my own experience. Using my inquiry I was able to rework my relationship to the project leader, and to take up a more equal position in relation to her.

In conclusion I note that in the field of women's equality work there is a tendency to conflate the need to sustain the actors and the need to sustain the work they are doing. This is dangerous; women's equality work needs resourcing; partnership and coalition work needs skilful facilitation. Women in power cannot compensate for hostile or devaluing organisational environments and must balance their own needs to thrive with considered strategies for working with women who are differently positioned.

However women can choose to help each other get accredited for the work they do. This means drawing from the self-knowledge that they share and using it with political judgement, not to keep each other in place, but to challenge devaluing representations of their work and to assert that we are contributors, adding value. It also means finding ways of being in organisational roles as a presence which stays in touch with passion, love, and playfulness, and which genuinely keeps equality at the centre, a real 'gender mainstreaming'. To achieve this specific sets of skills are needed. I named these in

chapter 12 as skills associated with crossing borders, working with situated knowledge, and keeping open intersubjective spaces.

Finally I turn to my methodology; the process and place of the conceptual framing that I developed as my inquiry evolved. I moved from attachment research as a way of thinking about strategies for sustaining myself as a feminist consultant, to feminist relational psychology and epistemology. I drew these together with group relations' theory and practice, feminist postcolonial theory and feminist organisation studies to conceptualise the multi-levelled challenges associated with my consultancy projects and the consultancy methodologies I developed.

The process of developing propositional knowledge turned out to be essential to developing a stronger sense of my professional identity: who I am, in my consultancy role. At the same time, I experienced a necessity to engage with other aspects of my identity and life process in order to develop my methodological and epistemological frame. Through my reading of key feminist texts, I recognised and named elements of the experiences I was exploring in my inquiry and found new subject positions from which to articulate what I brought to my consultancy. I developed a stronger sense of being grounded in knowledge located in my life process, as well as in the professional and political contexts of my consultancy. As I introduced inquiry more directly into my consultancy, I was able to invite colleagues and clients to engage directly in dialogue about our relationships on the projects. This generated material that enabled me to articulate for the first time the nature of my unique contribution as a consultant; a breakthrough in terms of my previous inability to name and claim the consultancy methods I had developed (chapter 4).

Writing the case studies has been a means of processing and moving on from a set of issues about my own self-image as a consultant. Completion of drafts of case studies two and three was each marked by a vivid dream. Each dream was a powerful representation of a key relationship I had reworked in the course of my inquiry. In the first, this was a dream of helping my client to move on, and in doing so, becoming free to move on myself (chapter 10). In the second, I was welcomed into the home of the project leader, and had a sense of being recognised as an equal by someone who in my perception represented 'mainstream' organisation consultancy, recognition which I had set out to attain. These were dreams of reconciliation, unspecified in form but recognisable in felt quality.

Through my inquiry *On Yearning and Un/Belonging*, I came to recognise that secure bases have to be made, and remade, as does collaboration between women. Shared values, goals, identity are not enough; there is no recipe that provides ready-made security, or togetherness. Nor is there any ready-made environment that nourishes women working collectively.

I am mourning the loss of this fantasy, but at the same time feel lighter; still desiring, open to opportunities to actively engage, with whom and on what terms I choose. At the same time I am able to name the skills I bring to work towards that vision of purposeful collaboration, based on recognition of difference and ability to mobilise differently situated knowing. I have been able moreover to identify marketable consultancy skills and methods, for facilitating 'transfer of learning' in partnerships and for non-gender specific goals, as well as for gender mainstreaming and promoting women in organisations. There has been a parallel between my difficulty in formulating my inquiry method, and my difficulty in formulating my consultancy method. It is with a sense of excitement that I am now able to name these 'methods' as my own.

---

[i] To name this as the beginning of my inquiry is artificial; as my autobiographical chapter shows, these are issues with which I have been concerned for the whole of my professional life. However this does mark the beginning of a consciously held inquiry, towards writing this thesis.

References

Acker, J. (2000) 'Gendered Contradictions in Organizational Equity' pp. 625 – 632 in *Organization* Vol. 7 no. 4 2000

Adler, N. J. and Izraeli, D.N. eds. (1994), *Competitive Frontiers*, Basil Blackwell Ltd.: Oxford, UK

Ainsworth. M. (1982) 'Attachment: retrospect and prospect' in Parkes, C.M. and Stevenson-Hinde, J. eds. *The Place of Attachment in Human Behaviour,* Tavistock: London

Albrecht L. and Brewer, R. (I990) *Bridges of Power, Women's Multi-Cultural Alliances,* New Society Publishers: Philadelphia, PA:

Alimo-Metcalfe, B. (1995) An Investigation of female and male constructs of leadership and empowerment, *Women in Management Review*, Vol. 10 No. 2:3-8

Andrew, A. and Montague, J. (1998) 'Women's Friendship at Work' in *Women's' Studies International Forum*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp.355-361

Anzaldúa, G. (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books

Aptheker B. (1989) *Tapestries of Life, Women's Work, women's consciousness and the meaning of daily experience,* Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press

Baker Miller, J. (1984) *'The Development of Women's Sense of Self,* work in progress series, Wellesley MA:.Stone Centre for Developmental Services and Studies

Baker Miller, J. (1976) *Towards a New Psychology of Women*, Boston: Beacon Press

Bateson, G. ed. (1973) *Steps Towards Ecology of Mind.* London: Paladin Books

Beebe, B. (1998) 'A Procedural Theory of Therapeutic Action: commentary on the symposium 'Interventions that Effect Change in Psychotherapy' in *Infant Mental Health Journal* vol. 19 no. 3: 33-339

Belenky M.F., Clinchy B.M., Goldberger N.R., and Mattuck Tarule, J. (1986) *Women's Ways of Knowing, the development of self, voice and mind*, New York: Basic Books

Bell, E. (2000) 'Infusing Race in to the Predominant Discourse on Action research', pp. 48-58 in Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2000) *Handbook of Action Research; Participative Inquiry and Practice,* London: Sage Publications

Bell, E., Nkomo, S. et al, (2000) *Our Separate Ways: Black and White Women's Paths of Success in Corporate America*, New York: Anchor

Benjamin, J., (1990) *The Bonds Of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, London: Virago

Benjamin, J., (1995) *Like Subjects, Love Objects, essays on recognition and sexual difference*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press,

Beres, Z., Wilson, G. (1998) 'Essential Emotions: the place of passion in a feminist network' pp. 171-182 n *Non Profit Management and Leadership*, vol. 8, no.2, winter 1997, pp. 171-182, Jossey-Bass Publishers

Bhavnani, R. (1994), *Black Women in the Labour Market - a research review*, Manchester: EOC

Billing, D. Y and Alvesson, M (2000) 'Questioning the Notion of Feminine Leadership: A Critical Perspective on the Gender Labelling of Leadership' in *Organization* Vol. 7 No. 3 July 2000, pp.144-56

Bion, W.R. (1961) *Experiences in Groups,* London: Tavistock.

Boucher, C. 'How Women Socially Construct Leadership in Organisations, a study using memory work', in *Gender Work and Organisation* vol. 4 no. 3 July 1997, pp. 149-158

Bourdieu, P. (1986) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste,* London: Routledge.

Bowlby, J. (1979) *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds,* London: Tavistock

Bowlby, J. (1988) *A Secure Base, clinical applications of attachment theory*, London: Routledge

Bowlby/Southgate (1996) 'Kainos, Mourning and Renewal Cycle', in Southgate, J.P. (1996) *An Attachment Perspective on Dissociation and Multiplicity*, paper presented at 3rd annual John Bowlby memorial lecture, Centre for Attachment Based Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy.

Brandser, G. C., 'Women – the new Heroes of the Business World?' pp. 3 –17 in *Women in Management review* Vol.11 No 2 1996

Bravette, G. (1996) Reflections on a Black Woman's Management Learning, pp. 3 -11 in *Women in Management review*, vol. 11 no. 3 1996

Brown, H. (1994) *Women Organising*, London and New York: Routledge

Buber, M. (1965) *The Knowledge of Man: A Philosophy of the Interhuman,* New York, N.Y.: Harper Torchbooks

Buber, M (1947/1965) *Between Man and Man* (Ronald Smith, Trans.) New York: Macmillan

Bunch, C. (1995) 'Foreword' in *Unspoken rules: sexual orientation and women's human rights*, pp. iii - viii, USA: International Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Commission

Burman, E. (1994) *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology, London: Routledge*

Byng-Hall, J. (1995) *Rewriting Family Scripts,* London: The Guildford Press

Campbell, B. (1996) Gender Crisis and Community pp. 102-109, in Kraemer S. and Roberts J. (1996) *The Politics of Attachment, Towards a Secure Society,* London: Free Association Books

Calas, L. and Smircich, L (1993) 'Dangerous Liaisons: the feminine in management meets globalization' pp. 73-83 in *Business Horizons,* March-April 1993

Calas, L. and Smircich, L (1996) 'From the Woman's Point of View: Feminist Approaches to Organisation Studies' pp. 218-257 in Clegg, S., Hardy C., and Nords, W. (eds.) *Handbook of Organisation Studies,* London: Sage

Calas, M. and Smircich, L. (1993), 'Dangerous Liaisons: the 'feminine in management' meets 'globalisation'', *Business Horizons,* March- April pp. 71-81

Calvert and Ramsey, 'Gender/Race/Class and the Constitution of Organisation', pp. 468-485 in *Organisation*, vol. 3 (4) 1996, London: Sage Publications

Chodorow, N. (1978) *The Reproduction of Mothering, Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender.* Berkeley: University of California Press

Clinchy, B. (1996) 'Connected and Separated Knowing: Toward a Marriage of Two Minds', pp. 205-247, in Goldberger, N., Tarule, J., Clinchy, B., Belenky, M. (eds.) (1996) *Knowledge, Difference and Power: essays inspired by 'Women's Ways of Knowing',* New York: Basic Books

Cockburn, C. (1995) 'Crossing Borders: Comparing Ways of Handling Conflictual Difference' pp. 94–114 in *Soundings,* Issue 12 Summer 1999, London: Lawrence and Wishart

Cockburn, C. and Hunter, L. (1999) 'Transversal Politics and Translating Practices', pp. 88-93 in *Soundings,* Issue 12 Summer 1999, London: Lawrence and Wishart

Cockburn, C. (1991) *In The Way of Women: Men's' Resistance to Sex Equality in Organisations,* London: Macmillan

Cockburn, C. (1998) *The Space Between Us, Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict, London: Zed*

Cockburn, C. (1999) 'Crossing Borders: Ways of Handling Conflictual Differences', *Soundings* 12: 99-114, London: Lawrence and Wishart

Code, L. (1991) *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Code, L. (1995) *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations.* London: Routledge

Coleman, G. (1991) *Investigating Organisations, a feminist approach:* Occasional Paper 37, Bristol: School for Advanced Urban Studies, Bristol University

Coleman, G. and Rippin, A. (2000) 'Putting Feminist Theory to Work: collaboration as a means towards organisational change' pp. 573-588 in *Organization* Vol. 7 no. 4 2000

Collinson, D.L. and Hearn, J., (1996) *Men as Managers, Managers as Men, critical perspectives on men, masculinities and management*, London: Sage

Coward, R. (1984) *Female Desire: women's sexuality today*, London: Paladin Books

Coyle, A. (1989) 'The Limits of Change: local government and equal opportunities for women, pp. 39-50 in *Public Administration* vol. 67, spring 1989

Dalmiya, V. and Alcoff, L. (1993) 'Are "old wives' tales" justified?' pp. 217-44.in Alcoff, L., and Potter, E. (eds.) *Feminist Epistemologies,* London: Routledge

Davidson, M. (1997) *The Black and Ethnic Minority Female Manager, Cracking the Concrete Ceiling*, London: Paul Chapman

de Lion, C.T. and Suk-Ching, H.(1994) 'The Third Identity of Modern Chinese Women: Women Managers in Hong Kong', pp. 43 - 56 in Adler and Izraeli, ed (1994), *Competitive Frontiers*, Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

de Matteo, L. (1994) 'From Hierarchy to Unity between Man and Women Managers, towards an androgynous style of management', *Women in Management Review*, Vol. 9 No. 7: 21-28

de Zulueta, F.(1993), *From Pain to Violence: the traumatic roots of destructiveness*, London: Whurr Press

Eagle, M. (1984), *Recent Developments in Psychoanalysis: a critical evaluation,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Eagly, A. and Johnson, in Vinnicombe, S. and Colville, N. (1995), *The Essence of Women in Management*, London: Prentice Hall

Ely, R. J. and Meyerson, D. E. (2000) 'Advancing Gender Equity in Organisation: the challenge and importance of maintaining a gender narrative' pp. 589-608. in *Organization* Vol. 7 no. 4 2000

Evelyn Oldfield Unit (1998) *Compassionate Leadership, a question of gender?* London: Evelyn Oldfield Unit

Faderman, L. (1985) *Surpassing the Love of Men*, London: The Women's Press

Ferrario, M. (1991) 'Sex Differences in Leadership Style: Myth or Reality?' *Women in Management Review*, Vol. 8 No. 3: 16-21

Field, J. (1936/81) *A Life of One's Own,* Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, St. Martin's Press:

Fineman, S. ed. (1994) *Emotion in Organisations* London: Sage

Fletcher, J. (1998) 'Relational practice, a feminist reconstruction of work', *Journal of Management Inquiry* 7: 2: 163-186

Forbes, J. D. (1973), *Aztecas del Norte: The Chicanos of Aztlan*, Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, Premier Books

Foucault, M. (1974) *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* London: Tavistock

Foulkes, S.H. (1983), *Introduction to Group Analytic Therapy,* London: Karnac

French, K (1995) 'Men and Locations of Power: why move over?' pp. 246 – 272 in Itzin, C. and Newman, J., eds. (1995) *Gender, Culture and Organisational Change,* London and New York: Routledge

Friere, P.(1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Harmondsworth, Middlx.: Penguin

Frye, M. (1983) T*he Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory,* Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press

Gatenby, B. and Humphries, M. (1999) 'Exploring Gender, Management Education and Careers: speaking in the silences' pp. 281-294 in *Gender and Education, Vol.11, no.3*

Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures,* New York: Basic Books

Gherardi, S. (1995) *Gender, Symbolism and Organisational Cultures,* London: Sage

Gilligan, C. (1993) *In a Different Voice, psychological theory and women's development*, Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press

Grant, J. (1999) 'The use and abuse of power in the autonomous women's movement' in Atkinson, K., Oerton, S. and Plain, G. eds. (1999) *Feminisms on Edge: Politics, Discourses and National Identities*, Cardiff: Cardiff Academic

Press
Grant, J. (2001) 'The Changing Face of Governance in Women's Organisations' in Cornforth, C. (ed.) (forthcoming 2001) *What do Boards do? - The governance of public and non-profit organisations*, London: Routledge
Graves Dumas, R. (1985) 'Dilemmas of Black Females in Leadership', *Group Relations Reader 2*, (1985) Colman, A. and Geller, M. eds. Washington, A. K. Rice Institute
Green, R. (1990) 'American Indian Women; diverse leadership for social change', pp. 61-73 in *Bridges of Power*, Albrecht and Brewer, (1990) Philadelphia P.A.: New Society Publishers,
Griffin, D., Shaw, P., and Stacey, R. (1998) 'Chaos, Complexity and Organization Theory' pp. 315-340 in *Organisation* Vol.5 no.3
Hampden -Turner, C. (1994) 'Values in conflict, an organisational perspective', Global Business Network. Paper presented at Global Business Network meeting, *Women as a Driving Force in the Year 2010.*
Haraway, D. (1991) 'Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective', ch. 9, pp. 183-201 in *Simions, Cyborgs and Women*, London: Free Association Books
Harding, S. (1986) *The Science Question in Feminism,* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press
Harding, S. (1987) Feminism *and Methodology*, Bloomington, USA: Indiana University Press
Harding, S. (1991) 'Thinking from the Perspective of Lesbian Lives' pp. 249-267 in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (1991) Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press
Harlow, E. Hearn, J. and Parkin, W. (1995) 'Gendered Noise: organisations and the silence and din of domination' pp. 91-107 in Itzin, C. and Newman, J., eds. (1995) *Gender, Culture and Organisational Change*, London and New York: Routledge
Harragan, B. (1977) *Games Mother Never Taught You,* New York: Warner Books
Heard, D. and Lake, B. (1997) *The Challenge of Attachment for Care Giving,* London: Routledge
Hearn, J. et al. eds. (1970) *The Sexuality of Organization,* London: Sage Publications:
Helgeson, Sally (1990) *The Female Advantage, Women's Ways of Leadership*, New York: Doubleday

Hennig, M and Jardim, A. (1978) *The Managerial Woman*, London: Marion Boyers
Heron, J. (1981) 'Experiential Research Methodology', pp. 153 - 166 in Reason, P. and Rowan, J. eds., *Human Inquiry: a sourcebook of new paradigm research,* Chichester: John Wiley and Sons
Heron, J. (1988) 'Validity in Co-operative Inquiry' pp. 40-59 in *Human Inquiry in Action,* Reason, P. ed. (1988) London: Sage
Heron, J. (1996) *Co-operative Inquiry: research into the Human Condition,* London: Sage
Hinde, J. eds. *The Place of Attachment in Human Behaviour*, London: Tavistock
Hirschorn, L. (1993) *The Workplace Within: Psychodynamics of Organisational Life,* London: MIT Press
Hite, L..M. (1996) 'Black Women Managers and Administrators; experiences and implications', *Women in Management Review* vol. 11 No. 6 1996 pp 11-17
Hochschild, A.R. (1993) 'Preface' pp. ix-xiii in Fineman, S. ed. (1993) *Emotions in Organisations,* London: Sage
Hoffman, E. (1990) *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language,* New York: Penguin
Hoggett, P. (1996), review of Obholzer, A. and Zagier Roberts, V. (1994) T*he Unconscious at Work: individual and organisational stress in the human services,* London: Routledge
Hollander, N. (1997) *Love in a Time of Hate,* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press:
Holmes, J. (1993) *John Bowlby and Attachment Theory*, London: Routledge
hooks, b. (1981) *Ain't I a Woman: black women and feminism,* Boston MA: South End Press:
hooks, b. (1984) *From Margins to Centre,* Boston MA: South End Press
hooks, b. (1991) *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, Boston MA: Turnaround
Iannello, K., 1992; *Decisions Without a Hierarchy, feminist interventions in organisations, theory and practice*, London and New York: Routledge
Institute of Personnel and Development position paper: (1997) *Managing diversity, a vision for the development of equal opportunities*
Itzin, C. (1995), Gender, Culture, Power and Change: a materialist analysis' pp. 246 - 272; in Itzin, C. and Newman, J., eds. (1995) *Gender, Culture and Organisational Change*: London and New York: Routledge

Izraeli, D. A. and Adler, N. J. (1994) 'Competitive Frontiers: Women Managers in a Global Economy' pp. 3-21 in Adler and Izraeli, ed (1994), *Competitive Frontiers*, Oxford: Blackwell

Jones, K. (1993) *Compassionate Authority*, London: Routledge

Jordan, J. V., Kaplan, A. G., Miller, J. B., Stiver, I. P., and Surrey, J. L., (1991)), *Working Paper No. 18: Women's Growth in connection - writings from the Stone Centre,* Wellesley MA: Stone Centre

Kelly, L., Burton, S. and Reagan, L. (1994) 'Researching Women's' Lives or Studying Women's' Oppression?' Chapter 2 in Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. *Researching Women's Loves from a Feminist Perspective*, London: Taylor and Francis

Kemp, S. and Bono, P. (1993) *The Lonely Mirror; Italian Perspectives in Feminist Theory*, London: Routledge

Kraemer S. and Roberts J. (1996) *The Politics of Attachment, towards a secure society,* London: Free Association Books

Lazarre, J. (1991) *Worlds Beyond My control,* New York: Viking

Lorde, A. (1984) 'Uses of the Erotic; the Erotic as Power' in S*ister Outsider: Essays and Speeches,* Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press

Lorde, A. (1984) 'Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference', paper delivered to the Copeland Colloquium, Amherst College, April 1980 reprinted in *Sister Outsider,* pp 114-123, Trumansburg, N.Y : Crossing Press,

Lugones, M. (1997) 'Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception' first published in *Hypatia* 2, 2 (Summer 1987) ; reprinted as ch. 17, pp. 275-290 in Diana T. Meyers (ed.) *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader,* London: Routledge.

Lyons Ruth, K. (1998) 'Implicit Relational Knowing: its role in development and psychoanalytic treatment', *Infant Mental Health Journal* vol. 19 no. 3: 282-289

Maddock, S. (1998), *Challenging Women: Gender, Culture and Organisation,* London: Sage

Maddock, S., and Parkin, D. (1995) A gender typology of organisational culture pp. 68-80 in Itzin, C. and Newman, J. ed. (1995) *Gender, Culture and Organisational Change*, London: Routledge

Maguire, P. (2000) 'Uneven Ground: Feminisms and Action Research' pp. 59 - 69, in *Handbook of Action Research: participative inquiry and practice*: Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. eds: London: Sage Publications

Maine, M. (1999) 'Epilogue: Attachment Theory: Eighteen Points' in *The Handbook of Attachment Theory, Research and Clinical Applications,* Cassidy, J. and Shaver, P. R. eds. (1999), The Guilford Press: New York, N.Y.:

Marris, P. (1996) *The Politics of Uncertainty, Attachment in Public and in Private Life*, London: Routledge

Marrone, M (1998) *Attachment and Interaction*, London: Jessica Kingsley

Marshall, J. (1984) *Women Managers: Travellers in a Male World,* Chichester: John Wiley and Sons

Marshall, J. (1991) 'Senior Women Managers Who Leave Employment', *Women in Management Review*, Vol. 6 No. 3: 4 -10

Marshall, J. (1992) Researching Women as a way of Life, pp. 281-289 in *Management Development and Education,* Vol. 23 Part 3

Marshall, J. (1995) *Women Managers Moving On, Exploring Career and Life Choices*, London: Routledge

Marshall, J. (1999) Living Life as Inquiry, pp. 155-171 in *Systemic Practice and Action Research,* Vol. 12, Issue 2, April 1999,

Mauther, N. and Doucet, A. (1998) 'Reflections on a Voice Centred Relational Method', pp.39-57 in Ribbens, J. and Edwards, R. eds. (1998) *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: public knowledge and private lives,* London: Sage

Maynard, M. (1994) 'Methods, Practice and Epistemology: The Debate about Feminist and Research' pp. 10 - 26 in Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. (1994) eds. *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective,* London: Taylor and Francis

McGill, I. and Beaty, L. (1992) *Action Learning, a practitioner's guide*, London: Kogan Page

McIntosh, P. (1985) *Work in Progress, Feeling Like a Fraud, working paper 18,* Wellesley MA 02181: The Stone Centre, Wellesley College.

McIntosh, P. (1985) *Feeling Like a Fraud: Part One,* Wellesley MA 02181: The Stone Centre, Wellesley College,

McIntosh, P. (1989), *Feeling Like a Fraud, Part 2*, Wellesley MA 02181: The Stone Centre, Wellesley College

Menzies Leith, I. E. P. (1960) ' Social Systems as a Defence against Anxiety: an empirical study of the nursing service of a general hospital' in Trist, E. and Murray, H. eds *The Social Engagement of Social Science, Volume 1: The Social Psychological Perspective,* London: Free Association Books

Meyerson, D. E. and Kolb, D.M. (2000) 'Moving out of the Armchair: Developing a Framework to Bridge the Gap between Feminist Theory and Practice' pp. 553-572 in *Organization*, vol. 7 no. 4 2000
Meyerson, D. E. and Scully, M. A. (1995) 'Tempered radicalism and the Politics of Ambivalence and Change', pp. 586-599 in *Organisation Science*/ Vol. 6, No 5, September - October 1995
Miller, E. (1989) *The 'Leicester' Model: Experiential Study of Group and Organisational Processes,* Occasional Paper no. 10, London: Tavistock Institute of Human Relations
Miller, E. (1993) *From Dependency to Autonomy: studies in organization and change,* London: Free Association Books
Miller, J. B. (1976) *Towards a New Psychology of Women,* Boston MA: Beacon
Mills, A.J., and Tancred, P. (1992) *Gendering Organisational Analysis*, London: Sage
Minetti, M.G. (1993) In Search of the Mirror: fusion and differentiation in women's groups, pp. 115-127 in Kemp S. and Bono, P. (1993) *The Lonely Mirror: Italian Perspectives on Feminist Theory,* London: Routledge
Minzberg, H. (1973) *The Nature of Management Work*, New York: Harper and Row
Mitchell, S. (1988), *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press
Mitchell, S. (1991) 'Contemporary Perspectives on Self: Toward an Integration', in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues, a Journal of Relational Perspectives,* Vol. 1 no. 2
Mohanty, C., Russo, A, and Torres, L. eds (1991) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* Bloomington: Indiana University Press
Mulholland, M. and Patel, P. (1999) Inclusive Movements: Movements for Inclusion in *Soundings,* Issue 12 Summer 1999, pp. 127-143, London: Lawrence and Wishart
Nelson, L.H. (1993) 'Epistemological Communities' pp.121-60 in Alcoff, L. and Potter, E. (eds.) *Feminist Epistemologies,* London: Routledge,
Neumann, J. E. and Noumair, D. A. (1997) *Women, Envy and Contemporary Organisational Life*, working paper presented to the 1997 symposium of the international society for the psychoanalytic study of organisations
Newman, J., eds. (1995) *Gender, Culture and Organisational Change*, London and New York: Routledge

Nkomo, S.M. (1988) 'Race and Class, the Forgotten Case of the Black Female Manager', pp. in S. Rose and L. Larwood (Ed) *Women's Careers - Pathways and Pitfalls*, London: Praeger

Obherholzer, A. and Zagier Roberts, V. eds. (1994) *Individual and Organizational Stress in the Human Services,* London: Routledge

O'Connor, P. (1992) *Friendships Between Women*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf

Ogden, T. (1986) *The Matrix of the Mind,* New York: Aronson

Opportunities 2000, (1998) *Towards Culture Change - examples of good practice*, London: Business in the Community

OPUS / Grubb (1995) *Exploring Societal Gender Dynamics: a workshop study of competence, competition and compassion in current male and female leadership,* a working paper presented to a conference at University of London 23/9/95, London: OPUS

Orbach. S. and Eichenbaum, L. (1994) *Between Women; love, envy and competition in women's friendships,* Arrow: *London*

Oseen, C., 'Luce Irigaray, Sexual Difference and Theorizing Leaders and Leadership', *Gender Work and Organisation* vol. 4 no. 3 July 1997

Page, M and Scott, A. (2001) 'Change Agency and Women's Learning: Learning in the Borderlands' in Keeble, L. and Loader, B. (eds) *Community Informatics: Shaping Computer Mediated Social Relations*, London: Routledge

Page, M. (2000), *Patterns for Change: effective local partnerships, working for women?* London: L. B. Lewisham

Page, M. (1999a) *Negotiating Power and Voice*: *dilemmas for feminist inquiry,* paper presented to UK WSN annual conference, Warwick University

Page, M. (1999b) Ph.D. Transfer paper

Page, M. (1998) CARPP Diploma paper

Page, M. and Lorandi, D. (1992) *Women Change Decisions,* research report no. V/5408/93-EN, Equal Opportunities Unit of the EC, DG5/B/4, rue de la Loi 200, Brussels B-1049

Page, M. and Scott, M. (1999), *Women Connect Phase 1 Report*, London: Community Development Foundation

Patel, P. (1999) 'Difficult Alliances: treading the minefield of identity and solidarity politics', in *Soundings*, Issue 12, summer 1999: 115-126, London: Lawrence and Wishart

Perlmutter, F.D. (1994) 'Women's Alternative Organisations' in Perlmutter, F. ed. (1994) *Women and Social Change, Pitfalls*, London, Praeger Washington, D.C.: National Association of Social Workers

Peters, Tom, (1998) *Circle of Innovation*, London: Hodder and Stoughton

Purvis, J. (1994) eds. *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective,* London: Taylor and Francis

Raymond, J. (1986) *A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Affection,* London: The Women's Press

Reagon, B.J. (1983) 'Coalition Politics: turning the century', in *Home Girls, a black feminist anthology*, Smith, B., ed, (1983) New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Colour Press

Reason, P. (1988) *Human Inquiry in Action,* London: Sage Publications

Reason, P. (1994) ed. *Participation in Human Inquiry,* London: Sage Publications

Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. eds. (2000) *Handbook of Action Research, Participative Inquiry and Practice*, London: Sage Publications

Reason, P. ed. (1994) *Participation in Human Inquiry,* London: Sage Publications

Reik, T. (1948) *Listening With the Third Ear: the inner experience of a psychoanalyst,* New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux

Reinharz, S.(1992) *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, New York: Oxford University Press

Reinfelder, M. ed. *(1996) Amazon to Zami, towards a global lesbian feminism*, London: Cassell plc.

Richardson, S. (1999) Transforming Conflict: Mediation and Reparation in a Staff Team, *Child Abuse Review*, Vol. 8:133-142

Riordan, S. (1999), *Women's Organisations in the Voluntary Sector: a force for social change*, Centre for Institutional Studies commentary series, University of East London, London

Rosener, J. (1990) 'Ways Women Lead', *Harvard Business Review*, Nov.-Dec. pp. 119-125

Rowan, J. (1981) 'A Dialectical Paradigm for Research' in P. Reason P. and J. Rowan (eds), *Human Inquiry: a sourcebook for new paradigm research,* Chichester: John Wiley and Sons

Rowan, J. and Reason, P (1981) 'On Making Sense' pp. 113-137 in *Human Inquiry: a sourcebook of new paradigm research* Reason, P and Rowan, J. eds. (1981), Chichester: John Wiley and Sons

Rutter, M. (1981) *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed*, 2nd edn. London: Penguin

Schein (1973) 'The relationship between Sex Role Stereotypes and Requisite Management Characteristics', *Journal of Applied Psychology* 57 (2): 95-100

Schein (1975) 'Relationships between Sex role Stereotypes and Requisite Management Characteristics among Female Managers', *Journal of Applied Psychology* (60) 3: 340-344

Sheppard, D. L. (1989) Organisations, Power and Sexuality: the Image and Self Image of Women Managers, pp. 139-157 in Hearn, J. et al eds. (1970) *The Sexuality of Organization,* London: Sage

Sinclair, A. (1998) *Doing Leadership Differently: Gender, Power and Sexuality in a Changing Business Culture,* Victoria Australia: Melbourne University Press

Sinclair, A. (1995) 'Sex and the MBA' in *Organisation*, Vol. 2 (2): 295-317

Southgate, J.P. and Randall, R. (1976) The Barefoot Psychoanalyst, London: Barefoot Books

Stanley, L. (1990) 'Feminist Praxis and the Academic Mode of Production: an editorial introduction' pp. 3-9 in Stanley, L. (ed.) F*eminist Praxis: research, theory and epistemology in Feminist Sociology:* London: Routledge

Stanley, L. ed. (1997) *Knowing Feminisms, On Academic Borders, Territories, Tribes*, London: Sage

Stanley, L., Wise, S. (1993) Introduction to the second edition of *Breaking Out Again*, pp. 1-15, London: Routledge

Stanley and Wise (1990) 'Method, Methodology and Epistemology in Feminist Research Processes', in Stanley, L. (Ed) *Feminist Praxis: Research, Theory and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology,* London: Routledge

Stanley, L. and Wise, S. (1983) *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Stern, D. (1998) The Process of Therapeutic Change involving Implicit Knowledge in *Infant Mental Health Journal* vol. 19 no. 3: 300 - 308

Still, L. (1994) 'Where to From Here? Women in management: the cultural dilemma', *Women in Management Review*, Vol. 9 No.4: 3-10

Thobani, M. (1995) 'Working for Equality in the London Borough of Hounslow', pp. 152-170in Itzin, C. and Newman, J., eds. (1995:) *Gender, Culture and Organisational Change*, London and New York: Routledge

Torbert, W. (1991) *The Power of Balance: Transforming Self, Society, and Scientific Inquiry,* London: Sage Publications

Torbert, W. (2000) 'The Practice of Action Inquiry': in *Handbook of Action research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* Reason, R. and Bradbury, H. eds. : 250 - 260 London: Sage

Torbert, W. and Fisher, D. (1992) 'Autobiographical Awareness as a Catalyst for Managerial and Organisational Development', pp. 184-198 in *Management Education and Development* Vol. 23 Part 3 1992

UK Women's Studies Network Newsletters July 1999, March and August 2000

Van Bruinum, I. L. (circa 1997) 'Getting a Glimpse of the Otherness of the Other; men and women in dialogue', publisher unknown

Vince, R. (1996) *Managing Change: reflections on equality and management learning,* Bristol: The Policy Press

Vinnicombe, S. and Colville, N. (1995) *The Essence of Women in Management,* London: Prentice Hall

Wahl, A. (1997) *The Power of Femininity based on Irony and Sexuality for Leadership in Organisations,* presentation at the 13th annual conference of the European Women Managers Development Network at Bodo, June 1997.

Wajcman, J. (1998) *Managing Like a Man: Women and Men in Corporate Management,* Oxford: Polity Press

Webb, J. 'The Politics of Equal Opportunity', pp. 159-169 in *Gender, Work and Organisation* Vol. 4 no. 5 July 1997

West, C. Zimmerman, D.H. (1991) 'Doing Gender' chapter 1, pp 13-37 in *The Social Construction of Gender* (1991) Lorbes, J., Farrell, S.A., eds, London: Sage Publications

White, J. (1995), Leading in Their Own Ways, women chief executives in local government, pp.193-210 in Itzin, C. and Newman, J., eds. (1995) *Gender, Culture and Organisational Change,* London and New York: Routledge

Winnicott, D. W. (1969) The Use of an Object and Relating Through Identification pp. 76-93 in *Playing and* Reality (1971), New York: Basic Books

Wolf, R. (1959: 32) *Sons of Shaking Earth,* Chicago 11: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books

Yuval Davis, N. (1997) *Gender and Nation,* London: Sage

Yuval Davis, N. (1999) 'What is Transversal Politics?' *Soundings* 12:94-8, London: Lawrence and Wishart

Zimmerman, B. (1991).'Seeing, Reading, Knowing: The Lesbian Appropriation of Literature' in *(En) Gendering Knowledge: Feminists in Academe,* Hartman, J. and Messer-Davidow, E. eds. (1991) Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press

Appendix 1

This appendix is made up of the following documents:

Appendix 1A

This compares inquiry and consultancy methods and maps the challenges of integrating inquiry into my professional practice, as I experienced them mid way through my inquiry. This document was submitted for my PhD upgrade (Page 1999b) and relates to my case studies, in particular chapters 10 and 11.

Appendix 1B

A flier summarising the consultancy method I developed in case study 3, chapter 11. This illustrates the integration of inquiry into my consultancy, which I achieved in this case study.

Appendix 1A

Table of consultancy and inquiry methods

CONSULTANT - RESEARCHER	RESEARCHER AS INQUIRER
Works to an objective or research agenda defined by and belonging to the client; within limits /boundaries of what is acceptable or appropriate to them in their context and role/can be worked with by the client system and its power relationships.	Works to an emergent research agenda determined by my self as a feminist concerned to open up choices for women as actors within the public sphere and in relation to each other as change agents, within a chosen field of intervention / context.
Works to a design & timetable agreed with the client, and (if any) colleagues or partners, and is determined by constraints relating to the client role / my accountability to him/ her within the client system/organisation.	Works to my own design, which might be adapted as the research agenda emerges, within constraints of my own resources (time, money, stamina, intellectual and emotional) and my co-researchers, partners or research participants.
Writes up the material in a form which addresses the results intended by the client, or which enables the client to work with the material, within her/his organisational role and position.	Writes up the material in a form which reflects and interrogates my own and partners'/ co-researchers' values, desire for action and change in the world, feminist epistemology, ontology, and / or which positions me within my professional field.
Results and action orientated, but action determined by the client, and influenced and discussed with the consultant.	Results and action orientated-chosen by me and partners as researcher/s - maybe in negotiation with the funder.
Ownership lies with the client.	Ownership lies with the researcher/s.
Challenge - but within bounds of acceptability of the organisation and client.	Challenge within the bounds of my own choice as the researcher, and permission of participants, partners / co researchers and funder.
Language and framing chosen by researcher on basis of client wishes and agenda/constraints.	Language and framing chosen by researcher, within my/our own constraints and desires for challenge.
Results must not be detrimental to the organisation and must protect the interest of the client contact - addressing women's issues within this overall framework.	Results designed to take forward women's struggle to create new opportunities and choices, within wider framework of political and social feminist and democratic movements.
Focus on practical knowing, generated through the inquiry cycle.	Moving through cycles of experiential, practical, presentational and propositional knowing,
Works within the dominant order, supporting attempts to challenge, subvert and reconfigure its gender relations in order to enable women to increase choices available to them: e.g. male and female stereotypes of leadership, management and democracy. Works within organisation. cultures and priorities, i.e. accepts needs for demonstrable results and solution orientation	Subverts the dominant order, its systems for making meaning and representation, creating spaces for alternatives to emerge. Documents these alternatives and their development and the results/dilemmas they work with, in order to interrogate and support interventions into and within the mainstream. Field of inquiry orientated, challenges product orientation and expectation to produce immediate solutions. Uses Socratic dialogue and Friereian problematising as techniques (Freire 1972).

Appendix 1B

MAYA Consultancy
AN ORGANISATION CHANGE MODEL for PROMOTING GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Challenges
- Organisational cultures and practices continue to support narrow definitions of leadership which exclude women and minorities
- Multiple methods are needed to enable women's leadership to be sustained, valued and rewarded in organisations

Opportunities
- Broader definitions of leadership, in organisations and society
- Increasing recognition of complexity and of the need for explicit work on values using multiple methods to achieve change in organisations
- Increasing numbers of women leading change interventions in organisations and society, through networks in public, professional and political spheres
- Opportunities for development of new practice through partnerships
- Gender Mainstreaming requirements by national and regional governments
- European programmes offering resources and profile for change interventions

Methods
- Develop vision and inspiration for gender mainstreaming change intervention with sponsor / champion
- Obtain authority to use methods which build ownership and active participation in change intervention, at all levels of the organisation
- Position gender mainstreaming change initiative as mainstream organisation development, not positive action for women
- Use dialogue based approach to involve women and men across the organisation in identifying challenges, and generating gender mainstreaming change objectives
- Create women only spaces, to generate vision, sustain motivation and energy
- Model valuing diversity of experience by enabling active contributions from black and minority ethnic employees, and from those who speak from marginal positions
- Generate coalition, between women in decision making positions and women who do not have recognition of their leadership qualities
- Enable women's leadership of the gender mainstreaming change intervention, and aim for active support from male champions
- Negotiate official status for women change agency leaders, and capacity build their change agency competencies
- Mirror back and profile the added value of change intervention results on personal and organisational levels
- Re-negotiate institutional power base of change intervention at regular intervals, in order to move the change intervention outcomes from the margins to more central positions
- Use multiple channels: formal and informal decision making networks, training and general management interventions
- Institutionalise and reward change results
- Evaluate at regular intervals, in order to maintain momentum and direction as organisational environment changes, and encourage emergence of new goals,
- Cyclical approach, using action learning to move through multiple phases of intervention

Appendix 2

Chapter 6
'Mapping the Territory of Workplace Dynamics Between Women'

Questions for interview based discussions

Topic guide

What interests you about this topic of how women relate to each other in organisations? What thoughts/ memories came to mind when I invited you to have this discussion?

Tell me about the experience you will be drawing from; the work you do/ have done with women. What work are you doing at the moment /most recently with women? What roles do you take on/ find yourself in? In what kind/s of organisation/s?

What comes to mind when you think of relationships with women in work settings? As peers or colleagues; as managers; as clients? Hopes? Fears? Disappointments?

Thinking about the whole of your experience-have your relationships with women changed over the years/ in different settings?

Do you see any patterns in how women relate to you in work settings; what they are hoping you will be able to give them / not give them or do for them; what assumptions they make about your values/ priorities/ beliefs?

Do you see any patterns in how you respond to these expectations? What feelings are triggered? How do you work with these?

How do you describe what you do best in your work or professional role? Your strengths? Preferred working style? Are there any issues for you in finding a way to articulate your strengths in relation to your work role?

How do you think women you work with perceive your strengths in your work role as a consultant, manager etc.?

What do you think you are most valued for in your work role? by women? by men?

Do you identify any of the following as within your experience?

Painful breakdown in relationships with women colleagues?

Expectations you could not meet from female colleagues?

Feeling used/ exploited / undervalued by other women?

Inability to accept your authority/expertise from female colleagues/clients?

Being envied/ feeling envious or competitive in relation to women colleagues or clients?

Being seen as betraying other women/ feeling betrayed by another woman in her work or public role?

Positive collaborative working with women colleagues?

Nurturing and support from women colleagues?

Having to cover up aspects of your identity or life from other women in order to be accepted or supported?

Issues around negotiating friendships / sexual relationships with other women in work relationships?

What other issues would you add?

Approach to interviews

Use questions as a topic guide, a map of the territory to be covered.

Invite focus on projections experienced, both those received and made, in the organisational role and how contributors worked with them. Distinguish between the feeling quality of relationships with women, and their ideological or rational content - the 'isms'.

Focus on getting a picture of what each discussant brings to her relationships with women- as well as her perception of what she gets and how she works with the interactions; what goes on for her and what sense she makes of what goes on

Aim for depth of content and be prepared to use a variety of methods to achieve this: tell stories, ask direct questions, invite dialogue.

Watch for balance between sharing own approach and experience, and leaving room for contributors' sense making frameworks to emerge.

Be alert to my experience of the interaction, during preparation, the interview, and afterwards.

Appendix 3

Chapter 6
'Mapping the Territory of Workplace Dynamics between Women'

Analyses of individual interviews

Chapter 6 contains two full analyses of interviews. Those contained in this appendix are referred to in this chapter and included in my findings (chapter 6 and appendix 4).
As I quoted extensively from my analysis of Contributor F in chapters 6 and 11, I have not included this analysis separately.

Contributor A (interview no. 1)

A was a management committee member of a feminist voluntary organisation; we had an established friendship with her based on mutual support for our research projects, and shard advocacy of feminist politics. In our discussion she draws mainly from her experience of conflict in this organisation.

My approach to the interview triggered dilemmas associated with my experience of the 'identity politics' of the '80's in the lesbian feminist movement. Would I be able to move from shared advocacy, to dialogue? Would A be open to engaging with my inquiry subject?

Our exchange was on two levels and is summarised in the table below:

- Contested conceptual frames, stance and analysis.
- Sense making, narrating, offering examples of interactions between women, sharing experiences.

Contributor A		
STATEMENTS about lived experience, approach and aspirations		**DESCRIPTIONS of lived experience**
1	Women's experience and expectations of interactions with women are shaped by their political views and priorities, and the environments in which they are acting. No general conclusion can be drawn about woman to woman dynamics; sense making must be situated in historical, political, organisational and social context.	There is a problematic shift of values within feminism: younger women not knowing what feminism is; replacement of collective working for change by individual career – doing your own thing; and lack of appreciation by women in power of role played by feminists in making their success possible - that women were promoted as a result of feminist campaigning for equal opportunities.
2	'Feminists and not women are the focus of my expectations of support and disappointment'. Feminism does not come from believing women are nice to each other but from a sense of injustice and rebelling, and recognition that women have to work together in their common interests - women have to combat their conditioning as it was then and probably is now - competing with each other for men...	A gives examples of: Disagreements being experienced as unsupportive or 'unfeminine' as well as 'unfeminist'. Being seen as hostile - pariahs for disagreeing. Attacking behaviour- resorting to formal grievance procedures against each other Management Committee (MC) Chair 'taking disagreement personally'. Envy and resentment at individual success and public recognition, attacking even tho' this served feminist values.
3	'Dis/liking' should not be a basis for women to deciding whether or not to work together; shared goals should take priority.	There is a current tendency to think you have got to like women you are working with – if you believe this you'll never get anything done.
4	'Women should value each other – and don't – that's what I find depressing!'	Disagreement can get confused with not valuing each other – it ties up with identity – who else you have something in common with.
5	Expectations of women towards women are shaped by context and environment, as well as by political views / priorities.	Disagreements were easier where there were shared feminist values; e.g. a woman volunteer used to working in competitive environments 'taking disagreements personally' in this women's organisation.

A's sense-making frame referred primarily to women's political views, including her own, and the political environment in which they were acting. She stated that my questions implied a 'psychological model' of gender difference, thereby challenging my use of 'women' as a generic category, and often reframing my questions in terms of political context and beliefs. She suggested that I needed to distinguish political differences between women and consider how these inter-cut with their expectations of each other and the type of organisations they worked in.

At certain points A. did allow 'women' as a generic category rather than 'feminists' to be the subject of our discussion. Like B, she makes qualifying statements defending against negative comparisons with men: that there was no evidence that men would have done any better. In the following I have asked A what the characteristics would be of a well-functioning women's organisation:

A: *Yes, there must be some baseline of shared interest/vision but that's not a satisfactory word*

M*: Would passion be a better word, or engagement in objectives and ideals?*

L*: mmm..*

M*: and not pressure to like each other?*

A*: mmm..*

A: *Women don't value each other enough! I mean in my organisation there is no respect for each other and that's what I find depressing, no valuing of people..*

M: *Not just achievements but who each other is?*

A: *Yes who each other is...and maybe that's what we were trying to say in our book and has never been said there strongly enough - that women don't value each other enough.*

M: *Perhaps we're not used to valuing each other in our public lives somehow because there's not enough sense of self worth?*

A: *Disagreement is confused with not valuing each other -*

M*: That resonates, if you're not feeling valued in yourself then it doesn't take much disagreement to feel bad and like retaliating.*

A: *I think that's where it's tied up with identity, it's a common sense thing like who you are. It's not necessary to make a psychoanalytic analysis, it's who else you have something in common with, and having a sense of that.*

During the discussion I became more aware of A's distinction between the dynamics between women, and the ways women interpret and work with these dynamics; between feminist analysis and gender analysis. I resolved to explore this further in my subsequent discussions.

After the interview I made the following note:

> *I came away from the afternoon feeling energised, affectionate and as if A and I had really engaged in dialogue with each other. This contrasted with the doubts with which I had set out, about our capacity to explore differences and my capacity to hold a separate position. I think this positive experience illustrates A's statement that the capacity for dialogue is closely associated with a sense of mutual valuing, and that this is linked with positive self-sense. In further research interviews I would like to explore this further.*
>
> *A said she would be open to having a second interview to consider the material I have collected and she would also take part in group discussion.*

Contributor D (interview no 4)

D is a freelance consultant working in the housing sector. I had no established relationship with her. We met at a women manager's network event where she expressed a strong interest in being interviewed for this inquiry.

The interview took place in my house and we made a good warm and positive connection during this conversation.

D is businesslike and friendly in her approach; I felt relaxed without worry that we would lose the thread or the momentum of the interview or that I had anything to prove. She spokes entirely as a consultant, and we did not make reference to other roles. The experience she drew from was consultant/client relationships in her consultancy role. Our discussion is summarised in the following table:

Contributor D		
STATEMENTS about lived experience, approach and aspirations		**DESCRIPTIONS of lived experience**
1	Difficulties I experienced with a male client *may* be due to gender.	Challenge to competency, competitive: gendered responses of her and male partner
2	Characteristics of working with female clients follow social gender roles although not all women or all men follow these	Women pay attention to the small things- the individual – not just the role; Women are friendly and able to mix the personal and the professional.
3	Women have legitimate expectations for care and consideration by colleagues / clients - which are not always met by men or women.	Not to be treated as a machine but as having physical needs! To be acknowledged as a person – especially by women: e.g. of woman who doesn't who D describes as 'odd'.
4	Enjoyment of sharing - hitting it off with women clients- not necessary or always the case but nice when it happens.	Shared passion for the work Fun.
	Looking after the individual and looking after the process are different - challenge can sometimes be necessary for the greater good.	Its sometimes hard to keep them separate.
6		'It doesn't necessarily work out this way with women – sometimes men are more friendly!'

In the following analysis I attempt to convey the pattern of our exchange, in relation to the explicit verbal content:

> *D shows her own expectations and wishes are associated with being valued; with receiving and giving care, nurturing as well as challenging, and balancing care for individuals with care for the process. She includes passion and fun in her paradigms of good relationships with female clients – combining friendliness with professional roles without necessarily having a separate friendship.*

I felt this was mirrored in our interaction in the interview; munching and drinking of tea, nurturing and 'paying attention to small things' in action! There was no conflict between her stated espoused way of relating to women in professional situations and what she describes.

She provided illustrations of how in her experience women did hold different expectations in relation to each other than in relation to men, of how they built and sustained work relationships and in how they were treated. She stated that although these expectations did not always work out the qualities they offered were enjoyed and special. This mirrored contributor C's account of how women build relationships.

She showed for example that she was able to offer a nurturing role and hold this in balance with offering challenge when this was appropriate, and to separate 'caring for the individual' from 'caring for the process'. She showed discomfort with competitive, challenge to her competence from a male client and contrasted her experience of this challenge to her male colleague who she felt enjoyed this more competitive, combative approach in the example to which she referred. She was careful to make it clear that her preferred ways of working held in relation to men as well as women. They were qualities rather than gender attributes embodied in men or women.

D's naming of the need to balance care for the individual and care for the process seemed key to my consultancy practice, and informed my analysis in my case studies.

Contributor E (interview no 5)

E was a researcher active in advocating the need for funding women's organisations. She runs her own consultancy practice and spiritual growth workshops for women. She is training to be a Shaman.

E was interested in and convinced of the value of my inquiry as a researcher as well as a consultant and feminist. She is familiar with and has used and referenced my previous research. I have high expectations of the interview, as I know she will be able to engage directly both in bringing experiences to it and in mutual sense making.

When I asked her to be interviewed she accepted with a lot of enthusiasm. She was interested in exploring a painful experience with a woman ex-colleague. There had been quite a build up of anticipation to the interview between us, which I experienced and recorded:

These mutual expectations may be difficult to live up to. I am aware of pre-interview anxieties that I also expere3inced in relation to A, B and C, a fear of somehow not living up to the expectations I imagine they hold of me as 'their kind of woman' – or feminist? Am I enacting an assumption that to hold credibility or to maintain the relationship I needed to enact the part of their espoused paradigm of how women should be?

Contributor E		
STATEMENTS about lived experience, approach and aspirations		**DESCRIPTIONS of lived experience**
1	***As a sacred circles leader*** Embraces feminine, 'earth-based' philosophies, which honour the leadership and power of woman.	Gender bias in childhood led her to emulate 'masculine' qualities; felt punished for her leadership qualities by women incl. women's movement; found affirmation in earth based philosophies.
2	Advocates for responsive leadership in contrast to 'power over': responding to the needs of the group and the opportunities in the environment.	Enabling, empowering, inspiring, and transforming self-image and re-framing experience through political analysis.
3	'Earth based philosophies value women's strengths in contrast to the women's movement which upheld masculine values in order to get women valued in society'.	'I have changed as a result of finding a set of values which value / allow me to value my leadership qualities.' 'I am less judgmental, more open; people find it easy to unfold with me and reveal their problems.'
5	***As a consultant*** Seeks to empower women's organisations by helping them become more powerful.	Holding up a mirror, illuminating. Celebrates what people have achieved, countering devaluing and low self-esteem. Brings the sacred and professional together, helping people celebrate and identify their achievements.
	'Women expect negative judgement due to devaluing of their work'.	Breaks down isolation between people showing communality and shaping by historical political and organisational forces to put the individual into context.
	Works from consensus.	Retreats when clients withdraw – 'when I have gone too far'.
	'I have to believe in what I am doing –	Aims to make clients feel valued, celebrated

	passion gives me fire'.	and empowered by new awareness of what they have achieved. Works strategically to achieve change.
	As a manager 'Women in organisations cannot afford to support each other regardless of role; but do sometimes hold these 'primitive' expectations.' 'Feminists have institutionalised these expectations.'	The woman manager in her organisation did not support her in relation to a male member of staff; she felt betrayed at the time but later understood that her manager could not afford to alienate her own [male] manager.
6	'Women are often driven by desire to be liked.'	Panicking at thought that people would hate her: portrayed as dictator by male manager.
	Friendship with women can be held alongside line management relationships.	*'I was friend and manager'* c.f. woman colleague who could not maintain a friendship with her as her manager.
	Women need to be nurtured in organisations.	'Where women are not nurtured- desire for friendship / isolation can flip into destructive dynamics'.
	The feminine has a strength that the masculine cannot touch – I made that connection [through earth-based philosophies] and am trying to see the connection between that and my enormous expectations of women.'	'Falls in love with' women colleagues with opposite qualities – attraction of opposites.

The following analysis of the session attempts to convey the pattern of our explicit verbal exchange, in relation to the implicit content:

> *At the beginning rapport seemed immediate; E responded with immediacy, is as if she knew what I am talking about and felt at home within my conceptual frame. Also as if she was enjoying the space as an opportunity to explore aspects of her experience that are or have been taboo among feminists. E engaged fully with each question and then used them to narrate, reflect and to make sense of her experience.*

In the session we moved through a series of detailed explorations of her experience in consultancy and management roles, of her changing sense of her self and of her thinking

about power and leadership. She described her developmental trajectory from values and ideologies that she believed privilege the masculine and in relation to which she felt devalued, to her current beliefs, which she described as the sacred. Her sense of herself was closely intertwined with her sense making paradigms, the way she lives out her subjectivity and passion:

Passionate belief in her values and challenging notions of power and powerlessness are both at the heart of this:

> *Um.....I haven't thought about how I do consultancy...One of the things that's really important to me is that I believe in what I am doing ...if I'm passionate then I have the fire and then I get the work done. I always say that the hardest work for me is work that I don't believe in and that I don't feel passion about.. Something you said there is helping me to clarify.. you said when you work with other consultants you have a shared agenda of wanting to promote change...*

The interview was rich in the quality of exchange and sharing and the degree of E's engagement with the subject. E moved between personal and professional experience and drew from both to fully engage with the subject. She used the session to think through and conceptualise how she did consultancy. When I read the transcript I felt that that E had sought and got from the session the kind of experience she offered to the women with whom she worked: an opportunity to have a mirror held up to their achievements in order to see what they had achieved in a different light.

Was there any parallel between the dynamics E described between women and the dynamics between us in the interview? It seemed to each of us that I had opened up a process slow to take off and hard to close down. At the end she said:

> *That was fascinating and I feel that I only just began to answer the questions towards the end...I felt like I needed to tell my story before I could answer the questions...*

I walked away exhausted and affirmed in our shared valuing of the research project. I wondered how this sense of exhaustion might relate to the 'enormous expectations of women' which E claimed she had and was trying to understand – and which we may have been enacting in the interview situation.

Appendix 4

Chapter 6
Mapping the Territory of Workplace Dynamics Between Women

Analysis of Interview Findings 1

Contributors identified specific features that they associated with working relationships with women. For each of these they identified they identified contrasting approaches that they associated with men. They also identified generative and degenerative aspects to features of women's relationships.

The first section of this appendix sets out gender specific features they idnetifeid. The second section sets out positive and negative aspects that they identified of women's expectations of each other. The third section sets out key factors they idnetifeid as determining women's interactions.

What women bring to work roles: gender differences identified by contributors

- Bringing (more) emotion and passion into their work and finding it less easy to set these aside where necessary to carry out a task; men tend to compartmentalise (B, C, D).
- Being (more) overly concerned with relationship, being more wholistic; looking at the whole dynamic; where men just get on with the task (B, C).
- Wanting to or being expected to nurture by women and by men: men are expected and more likely to challenge and compete (C).

- Being expected to work within consensus and not being allowed to rock the boat or expected to challenge by women or by men; may be culture based (A, C, E,).
- Having more fluid boundaries between friendship and work, being more likely to make friends or introduce references to 'home' into work relationships; men keep more solid boundaries and are more likely to sexualise friendship or friendly gestures: see also 10 below (B, C, E).
- Seeking to build professional relationships with each other on trust, empathy, shared values/project, collaborative; men more likely to focus exclusively on task withouth attending to process, and less trusting, more sequential division of labour (you draft I will pick apart) (C).
- Women often relate to men in ways they expect: challenge, or 'engineering model' (E)
- Women often move between male and female ways of relating – between shadow and formal systems (C).
- Caring for individuals and caring for process to achieve task; managing the tension when these are in conflict (C, D, F).
- Managing boundaries: juggling social stereotypes and professional roles and setting boundaries when this is necessary to keep to task (B, C, E).

Stories which contributors told suggested that as these features were not valued in their working environments even positive aspects of them were problematic for women. Yet they also showed that these qualities were features of their own working relationships and were the enjoyable aspects of their work with women. The depth with which contributors engaged with the discussion seemed to indicate that these relationships with women were important, but little explored; their stories suggested that risk emanated from the devaluing environments in which they were working.

Contributors' initial ambivalence about the inquiry topic may have signalled fear of being devalued once again by oversimplified negative comparisons to behaviours based on a male norm.

Women's expectations and experiences of each other in professional relationships

Negative experiences

This was a painful and difficult area. Two of the contributors (A, B and F) denied having any specific expectations of women and then moved on to describe painful or negative experiences from which they distanced themselves. C and E owned specific expectations that they held and/or experienced from women, based on stereotypes which had negative consequences and which undermined their authority. D was these only one who described only positive experiences but she too told a story of a black female client losing an opportunity for promotion for the qualities which as consultants she (D) and her male colleague had enjoyed in their own working relationships.

Stories of negative experiences illustrated expectations not being met in the following areas:

- Women not valuing each other's work on women's equality:
    - younger generations of women not appreciating the role feminists have played to make their career progression possible (A);
    - a woman manager devaluing her work with women on equal opportunities (F);
    - women's organisations devaluing their own work (E).
- Women not allowing each other to lead, negative descriptions of women's leadership (A; F; E).
- Women liking each other / needing to be liked given too high a priority and getting in the way of working to goals (A; C; E).
- Women in positions of power more defined by their relationships than their positions; e.g. in hierarchies relationships with other women at lower levels in the hierarchy are experienced as threatening by male peers (C; E).
- Disagreement between women experienced by other women to which they referred as unsupportive - unfeminine and unfeminist (A; D; E).
- Envy and resentment at individual success, in the public sphere (A).
- Competitive dynamics between women when in male presence (B).

- Loss of women's friendship when refused to conform to gendered expectations (C):
    - Women resisting and resenting challenge, expecting to be nurtured by each other (C, E);
    - Hostility from women when not affirmed in 'oppressed' victim / oppositional roles (C).
- Permeable boundaries and a desire to care for the other making it hard to say no or assert task related needs; over-reliance on and clumsy use of formal processes (C; D; F).
- Discomfort with exercising power over, experiencing this as dysfunctional and not a part of themselves they like very much - 'Fuhrer mode' (A; E; F).
- Wanting to be 'one with the girls' – to be liked- friendship or collaboration rather than exercising responsibility or power over (A; B; C; D; E; F).
- Rejection of friendship / love where this was experienced as in conflict with managerial roles.
- Having to be constantly 'on guard' against breaches in authority – from men, from women, from inner voices (C).

Positive experiences

All of the contributors identified and described positive experiences specific to their professional and working relationships with women; without exception they also identified more problematic aspects.

Positive experiences

- Feminists / women working together towards shared goals, challenging, debating and arriving at agreements to work on defined tasks across difference of opinion (A and B) and leadership styles (C).
- Excellent leadership and management by a woman boss in a mixed organisation - corporate setting (B).
- Passion and friendship without losing sight of task focus (all aspired to this model): looking after the individual and the process (B, D, E, F).
- Building relationship through shared values; jointly building something, sharing credit, trust (A; C; E; F).
- Paying attention to the small things: the individual not just the role (D).
- Mixing the personal and the professional (D; F).

- Shared passion for the work and fun (E; D; F).
- Connecting easily with women about ideas, buzz, creativity, shared humour (F).

These positive experiences were identified less easily than the negative. In four cases negative stories were told first to illustrate woman to woman dynamics (A: B; C; E); in two cases (D and F) positive examples were given first, but in one of these (F) it was a surprise to the contributor to associate these with a woman - specific pattern. In the other, (D) the example given illustrated qualities the contributor associated with her own enjoyment of working with a woman client, in contrast to her client's male or female peers who did not appreciate these qualities.

Problematic aspects

Why were these positive and enjoyable experiences described with such ambivalence? In the following I indicate how I interpreted the reasons for this ambivalence in terms offered by contributors, and indicate where they have been substantiated by research:

- These ways of working are devalued within malestream cultures (Fletcher 1998; Marshall 1984) and these cultures often predominate in organisations (C and E).
- Process and relational work is perceived to be at odds with effectiveness within performance cultures (F) rather than as enhancing performance (A, B, F, C, D, E).
- In gender-mixed organisations, senior men often closely monitor women to women relationships across differences of power. They often perceive these relationships as either 'breaking ranks' with the order of power based on male hierarchy (E), or as a basis for devaluing the status of the more senior woman by association (B, E, F).
- Women have difficulty with 'power over' and are not good at reconciling this with their preferred way of building work relationships through empathy and collaboration (A; C, D, E, F).
- Working on women's equality issues is no longer valued within my organisation (F).
- Many men and women have an investment in reproducing gendered stereotypes and cannot tolerate women who break them (A, C, D, E).
- Women are threatened by each other's success or exercise of power in the public sphere (A, E): 'unfortunately women do not value each other' (A, referring to women's organisations).

The evidence suggested that my contributors, whose value bases differed widely, all valued the positive aspects of woman to woman interactions they described and shared different degrees of disappointment and pain around the negative aspects. They identified having an affirmative alternative value base (A, C, E, F) and learning from experience how

to use power to maintain their authority in professional settings (A, B, C, D, E, F), as essential to sustain them in their role and position in their organisations. None of them considered either their value base or the attributes they brought from gender role socialisation as adequate to equip them to deal with the realities of expectations and responses from men and women in work based relationships.

What these contributions suggested is that women needed an ability to work against social conditioning, their own and others', in order to access and exercise leadership and position power. They needed this in relation to each other, as well as in relation to men. Their stories suggested to me that women need to navigate between the different worlds of professional work-based relationships and gendered social expectations and to develop a set of competencies that are adapted to that challenge. However this was not stated explicitly by contributors, nor was it a conclusion with which they would necessarily agree. I developed this theme in my own analysis throughout my inquiry.

In the next subsection I summarise what factors contributors did identify to make sense of their accounts of gender difference and woman to woman interactions. I then move back to explore their accounts of their strategies and practice in working with these dynamics with women clients and colleagues.

What key factors did contributors identify as determining women to women interactions?

Political and social environment

For contributor A, key factors determining interactions between women in organisational roles were their political views, the organisational context in which they were operating, and political environment. For B, who was talking about mixed corporate organisations, key factors were other differences through which gender was mediated, such as individual temperament, levels of experience, cultural context, age. In both cases their lens reflected the organisational cultures of which they were a part: feminist politics and the US corporate sector's focus on the individual and diversity. Both made reference to changes in the work environment to which women were adapting. In the US corporation, team based flatter structures meant women and men had learned to be effective team

members. In the UK women's organisation, the performance and contract culture had introduced a move towards service and away from feminist social change and political campaigning which had consequences for organisational structure and roles. Managerial values had replaced the collective while loss of shared values had led to breakdown of working relationships.

Alternative Values

For contributors A, C and E, an alternative value base from which to actively counter normative social expectations of women was key to positive women to women interactions in professional roles. A stated at the beginning of her interview that her expectations and disappointments in relation to women were related to their feminist and not their gender identity.

Earth-based philosophies had offered C and E a way of valuing their own leadership qualities and a framework for development work with women and women's organisations. Both described themselves as working against prevailing norms and expectations associated with traditional gender roles expressed by both women and men.

B, D and F did not refer to holding alternative value frames, but did describe themselves or women with whom they were working as sometimes in conflict with the prevailing organisational values as expressed by women or men. F for example talked about being devalued for being 'out there' and involved with local communities in a culture that valued policy work as 'sitting at your desk'. D referred to the black woman client with whom she enjoyed working as being assertive and 'getting up the nose of fellas'.

Experience, learned behaviour and ways of being

B, F and E each referred to learnt skills as key in knowing how to exercise authority for women – and being new to position power as a disadvantage. C and E described their own process of learning and teaching from a new value base which challenged women's socialisation and gender based expectations from men and women. The latter showed that while leadership skills might come naturally, women needed to learn how to exercise

them in male-defined social and organisational environments where both women and men enacted traditional gender stereotypes and kept them in place.

Gender norms and socialisation

All contributors referred to and illustrated gender difference in professional roles, qualified with a statement of doubt about the validity of making generalisations. It was as if the act of naming the differences was painful, and risky.

Contributors made statements about gender difference as we explored specific incidents. They emphasised that women were as able and as competent as men at performing within norms of effectiveness defined within their organisations. They also referred to aspects of their own work relationships with women that they valued, but which were at odds with or at a tangent to organisational expectations. This tension between what they valued and what was valued in their organisations created tensions that were problematic. As the quotes below illustrate, they spoke of hopes and disappointments – and often isolation:

> In a women's organisation like X for e.g. there is that lack of a shared vision of what feminism is- the most awful things have been going on-women being really nasty to each other in the organisation. Taking grievances against each other as staff members and part of that I think is the professionalisation of voluntary organisations-all now have target in order to get money they're supposed to run like commercial organisations-how many widgets you produce
> Interview with A

> I had these expectation of X because she was a woman and I expected her to behave in a certain way and certainly if there was a conflict with a man I expected her to take my side .....it was only on the very last day of working with her and I..... took on board what her organisational role was and her position in reorganisation and relationships and how these affected what she could and couldn't do....
> Interview with E.